7. VARAHA PURANA

LORD VARAHA ENLIGHTENS PRITHVI

PRITHVI'S QUERIES

Lord Vishnu, in his incarnation of Varaha (a boar), had liberated Prithvi (Mother Earth) from the clutches of Hiranyaksha, the mighty demon who had abducted her to Rasatal. After being rescued, Prithvi heaved a sigh of relief and looked at her saviour, who was smiling. She curiously asked lord Varaha- "How does the process of creation begin in the beginning of each Kalpa? What is dissolution? How do you nurture the whole creation? In what order do all the four yugas occur and how are they calculated? Why do you take incarnation in each yuga? All these things puzzle me a lot and I request you to enlighten me on all these subjects."

Lord Vishnu burst into laughter and the whole universe, including the deities became visible to Prithvi through his opened mouth. Prithvi became so frightened by this amazing sight that she started to tremble in fear. Lord Vishnu then transformed his appearance and revealed his divine form to Prithvi so that she could become free from her fright. When Prithvi saw the divine form of lord Vishnu, who was in his meditative sleep taking rest on Sheshnag, all her fear vanished. She was extremely pleased to see the divine appearance of lord Vishnu and thanked her good fortune. Prithvi, filled with extreme devotion eulogized lord Vishnu.

Lord Vishnu was extremely pleased by her eulogy and said-"The answers to the questions you have asked are not easy to understand, but still I shall try to satisfy your curiosity. The supreme Almighty is eternal. In the beginning of creation, Ego (ahamkar) as well as the five basic elements- space, water, earth, air and fire manifest themselves from the supreme Almighty. Subsequently, the great element-mahattatva, nature and collective conciousness manifest themselves. The collective conciousness then combines with each of the three basic qualities-satva (pure), rajas and tamas (dark) and exits in three different states. Its combination with the dark quality results into the manifestation of Mahadbrahm which is also called prakriti or nature by the enlightened ones. Kshetragya (soul) is considered to be more superior than the Prakriti. This way the different permutations and combinations of all the three gunas with collective intelligence result into the creation of different "tanmatras"(subtle form of matters). From the tanmatras are created the "Indriyas" or sense organs. This is the way how the Universe comes into existence. I then create all the living creatures with the help of five basic elements."

"In the beginning there was nothing but empty space. Subsequently, various natural elements like shabda (sound), akash (ether), vayu (air), teja (light) and jal (water) came into being respectively - each of the latter manifesting from the former. Then, I created you (earth) to provide base to all the living creatures. The combination of earth and water resulted into an egg (anda). As the egg grew in size, I manifested myself as Narayan within it. During each kalpa a lotus manifests itself from my navel upon which is seated lord Brahma. I then request lord Brahma to commence creation. Inspite of all his efforts, lord Brahma does not succeed in commencing his creation. As a result he becomes furious and from his fury manifests a divine child who starts to wail incessantly. The divine child is none other than Rudra who is requested by lord Brahma to begin creation but the child being incapable of doing that decides to acquire power by doing penance and enters into deep water."

"Lord Brahma then created Prajapati from his great toe of his right foot and Prajapati's consort from the great toe of his left foot. The manifestation of Prajapati and his consort marks the beginning of copulative creation and thus Swayambhuva Manu is bom. In the course of time the population increased. This is the way how creation takes place in each kalpa."

Mother Earth requested lord Varaha to shade some more light on the creational process as her curiosity had still not been totally satisfied. Lord Varaha replied- "At the end of the last kalpa, when the whole universe was engulfed in darkness, Narayan went into his yogic-sleep. After waking up he found the world devoid of any creature. Narayan, being the supreme Almighty- the creator, the nurturer as well as the annihilator, decided to commence creation. The term Narayan means one who has his abode in the water- nar means water and ayan means abode. First of all five types of avidya (false knoledge) manifested from Narayan- tamas (darkness), moha (attachment), mahamoha (absolute attachment), tamisra (jealousy) and andhatamisra (anger). After the manifestation of these five avidyas, came into existence immovable things like mountains, trees etc. These being the primary creations came to be known as mukhya sarga (main creation). Continuing with his creations, lord Brahma created species that were superior to the earlier creation-animals. This particular creation was called Tiryaksrota (quadruped). This way Brahma did his creation. Brahma's sixth creation was called Satvik sarga which consisted of the deities who were all virtuous by nature. The creation of human beings was seventh in order and was known as Arvaksrota sarga. Even human beings were of three types- those who were predominantly virtuous possessed satva guna had radiant personality and never experienced sorrow but those who possessed rajas and tamas gunas experienced sorrows."

"Brahma's eighth creation was called "Anugrah sarg" in which he created the sages and the hermits for the benediction of the world. The nineth creation of Lord Brahma was called Kaumar sarg (creation of adolescent beings). So, these are the nine main types of creation through which Brahma creates. First of all Rudra and other deities manifested themselves and then came into being eternal adlescents like Sanak, Sanandan, etc. Subsequently, all the ten manasputras of Brahma

manifested themselves- Marichi, Angira, Atri, Pulah, Kratu, Pulasya, Pracheta, Bhrigu, Narada and Vashishtha."

"Lord Brahma's first creation-Rudra had manifested himself as Ardha narishwar (half male and half female). At the request of Brahma, Rudra dismembered his female part resulting into the creation of two distinct forms- one male and the other female. Later on, ten more Rudras manifested from the male form and all of them collectively came to be known as 'Eleven Rudras'."

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PRIYAVRATA ATTAINS TO HEAVENLY ABODE

Describing the incident which enabled King Priyavrata to attain to heavenly abode Lord Varaha told Prithvi-

"Swayambhuva Manu lived during the first kalpa. He had two sons- Priyavrata and Uttanpad. Priyavrata was extremely virtuous by nature. In course of time, he relinquished his throne and after distributing his kingdom among his sons went to Badrikashrama to do penance. Once sage Narada paid a visit to his hermitage. Priyavrata received his esteemed guest with all the respect which made Narada extremely pleased. Priyavrata then requested Narada to narrate about some interesting incident which had occured in his life.

Narada narrated about an interesting incident which had happened while he was on his way to meet Priyavrata- "I experienced an amazing incident yesterday while I was passing by a lake in Shwetdweepa. I saw a divinely beautiful woman who was standing alone at the bank of that lake. I was surprised to find such a beautiful woman at such a lonely place. For a moment I became so infatuated by her beauty that I lost all control over my senses. My lust had made me devoid of all my knowledge and learning. Now, I became very worried and ashamed of my conduct- but the damage had already been made. I immediately realized that she was not an ordinary woman. To my surprise, I saw a form of a divine person visible clearly within her body. Within nextfew moments two other male forms revealed themselves. Suddenly, all three of them disappeared leaving behind just that divine lady. I was dumbstruck by this amazing incident. I asked her as to who she was. The divine lady disclosed to me that she was none other than goddess Savitri - the mother of all the Vedas and since I was unable to recognize her therefore all the knowledge had vanished from my memory. She also revealed to me that the three divine men which had manifested themselves within her body were in fact the three Vedas- Rigveda, Samveda and Yajurveda. After revealing these amazing facts to me goddess Savitri assured me that by taking a bath in that lake I would not only regain my memory of the Vedas but also of all my previous births. I eulogized goddess Savitri and thanked her for the blessings showered on me. I then bathed in that lake and to my pleasant surprise I now remembered everything of my past births as had been prophesised by goddess Savitri."

Priyavrat was very surprised and requested Narada to describe some interesting incident related with his past birth. Narada narrated the following incident to him- "In Satya Yuga, I was born in a brahmin family and was named Saraswat by my parents. I was very studious and grew up

to become a renowned scholar. The almighty God had blessed me with immense riches and I never experienced scarcity of any kind in my life. But very soon I got bored of my monotonous and routined life. It had become clear to me that there was more to life than just worrying about the gains and losses. So, I decided to do penance to attain salvation. I distributed all my wealth among my sons and went to the bank of river Saraswati, where I first performed the rituals of shradha in the name of my ancestors and then performed yagyas. I also donated lot of wealth to poor people. Being satisfied, I then went to Pushkar tirth and did penance at the bank of river Saraswat by continuously chanting the sacred mantra "om namo narayan" and brahm par stotra. Ultimately, lord Narayan became pleased and appeared before me. Lord Sri Hari asked me of my wish and I express my desire to get united with his divine form. But, lord Narayan told me that the world needed me and so this desire of mine could not be fulfilled. He blessed me and gave me my name- Narada because I had 'donated' water (nar) to my ancestors during the course of performing shradha rituals. Although my wish of uniting with the divine form of Sri Hari had

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remain unfulfilled but still there was a consolation as I had been fortunate enough to see his divine form with my mortal eyes. Thereafter, I devoted my life to the worship of Sri Hari.After my death, I attained to brahmaloka-1 had been adequately rewarded for my devotion toward lord

Sri Hari. Later on, I manifested as one of the ten manasputras of lord Brahma when he commenced his creation. It was only because of the blessings of Sri Harithat I came to be regarded as 'lok guru' by the masses. So Priyavrat, if you are desire of attaining salvation then you should follow my example and devote your life in the name of Lord Sri Hari."

Prithvi, who was listening to the tales narrated by Lord Varaha with rapt attention asked him whether it was possible for anybody to see Lord Narayan with his/her mortal eyes. Lord Varaha replied - "Lord Narayan has taken ten incarnations in various forms such as Matsya (fish), Kachchap (tortoise), Varaha (boar), Narsimha (half human and half lion), Vamana (dwarf), Parshurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. The last incarnation, Kalki is yet to take place. A man can realize Lord Narayan by having total devotion in any one of the ten incarnations. Even the deities are incapable of this divine experience, what to say about humans. Lord Brahma is the manifestation of all the three qualities of Sri Hari and actually it is He (Sri Hari) who creates in the form of Lord Brahma. It is He who manifests himself in various natural forms like earth, water, fire, air and sky. It is He who manifests himself in various abstract qualities like consciousness. He is omnipresent and the whole universe is pervaded by him."

Prithvi was anxious to know whether Narada's sermons had any effect on Priyavrat and asked Lord Varaha regarding this. Lord Varaha replied- Priyavrat was so impressed by Narada's discourses that he relinquished his throne and went to do penance after equally distributing his kingdom among his sons. Ultimately, he did manage to attain to the abode of lord Sri Hari by the virtue of his total devotion.

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ASHVASHIRA'S UNIFICATION WITH LORD NARAYAN

Prithvi asked lord Varaha about the famous incident which described Ashvashira's unification with lord Narayan. Lord Varaha then narrated

the following tale- "During ancient times, there used to live a virtuous king named Ashvashira. He had performed an Ashwamedha Yagya in which he had donated large amount of wealth. Once, sage Kapila arrived at his palace acoompanied by sage Jaigishavya. King Ashvashira received both his distinguished guests with due honor. After the formalities were over, he asked both his guests about the means by which lord Narayan could be pleased and also about the rituals pertaining to the worship of lord Narayan."

Both the sages being enlightened souls realized that Ashvashira was asking this question out of his ignorance. So they decided to enlighten him on the omnipresent nature of Narayan and said-'What do you mean by pleasing Narayan? Can't you see two Narayans standing in front of you?' But Ashvashira was unamused and unconvinced so he replied- 'I don't deny that both of you possess supernatural powers and also that all your sins have destroyed on account of the virtues attained by doing penance. But, I don't believe your claim to be Narayan.Lord Narayan is the almighty God and the supreme deity. He holds a conch, a chakra and a mace in his hands. He wears pitambar and has Garuda as his mount. His glory is indescribable and incomparable.'

As Asvashira had raised valid points, sage Kapila transformed his appearance with the help of his divine powers. Similarly, sage Jaigishavya transformed his appearance and became Garuda. But Ashvashira still remained unconvinced and said- How can I accept you to be Narayan as there is no sign of lotus manifesting from your navel in which lord Brahma has his abode.'

Sage Kapila then slightly transformed his appearance and created an illusion whereby a lotus flower emanating from his navel became visible to Ashvashira. Sage Jaigishavya sat on that lotus flower in the guise of lord Brahma. Not only that, they also created an illusion due to which all types of living creatures inside the palace premise.

Now, Ashvashira was really confused and requested both the sages to break the magic spell. Both the sages decided not to test the limit of Ashvashira's patience and so, they trasformed their respective guises into their original appearances. Both of them said- 'Narayan is one but can manifest himself in countless forms. The whole universe is His creation

and He is present in every single creature. It is impossible for a mortal being to bear the radiance of almighty Narayan and it is only when He appears in his more gentle form that the enlightened person is able to see him. Therefore, you should engage yourself in the service of mankind, considering each human being to be the medium through which lord Narayan manifests himself.

Ashvashira was satisfied by the explanation given by both the sages but there was still one question bothering him a lot so, he asked- 'Who is most likely to attain salvation- a knowledgeable person or a person who indulges in rightful deeds?' Sage Kapila narrated the following tale- 'Once, sage Raimya and king Vasu had asked the same question to sage Brihaspati. At that time Brihaspati had replied that anybody who performed his duties with a sense of detachment is sure to attain salvation and to prove his point he had narrated the following tale- 'During ancient times, there lived a brahmin named Sanyaman. He was the descendant of sage Atri. One day, while he was going to take his bath he met Nishthoor-a fowler, who used to catch birds and animals for his livings.'

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Sanyaman reprimanded Nishthoor for his evil deeds and said- Why do you trap innocent birds and animals? Nishthoor replied- 'The almighty God is present in each living creature. One who is desirous of attaining salvation must under no circumstances allow his ego to dominate him.

The 'doer' is not the man but the supreme Almighty present in him. Keeping this fact in his mind a man should perform his duties with nonchallance and a sense of detachment. If I earn my livelyhood by catching birds and animals then it is the will of almighty.' To prove his point, the fowler spread his iron-net and kept dry blocks of wood underneath it and then requested Sanyaman to ignite those blocks. Sanyaman was surprised but burnt the wodden-logs as per the fowler's instruction. In a short time all the wodden-blocks became ablaze and the flames startes coming out from the thousand of small holes of the iron-net. The fowler then told Sanyaman that although the flames coming from each hole appeared to have distinct sources, yet the fact was that the flames manifested from the single source-wodden blocks that were burning beneath the iron-net.

The fowler said- "It was impossible to extinguish the fire untill and unless the source of the fire was extinguished. Each hole of the iron-net can be compared with an individual and the almighty God with the source of fire. A man does what God wills and he can never experience sorrow provided he constantly remembers the Almighty even while he is performing his daily chores." Sanyaman was very much impressed by the fowler's wisdom. Having finished his tale, sage Brihaspati told Raimya- "Now it must be evident to you that salvation is within the reach of any individual. It does not make much difference whether the seeker of salvation is a householder or a hermit aspiring for knowledge." Continuing with the story of Ashvashira, lord Varaha told Prithvi- "King Ashvashira was so impressed by Kapila's preachings that he went to Naimisharanya and spent his rest of his life in the service of lord Narayan. Once, while he was performing yagya, suddenly lord Vishnu manifested himself from the altar in the form of a brilliant effulgence and the identity of Ashvashira merged with it. This way, Ashvashira got united with lord Vishnu by the virtue of his deep devotion.

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KING VASU AND SAGE RAIMYA UNITE WITH SRI HARI

Prithvi was anxious to know about the effect sage Brihaspati's discources had on King Vasu as well as sage Raimya. She asked lord Varaha- "What

did both king Vasu and sage Raimya do after listening to the preachings of sage Brihaspati?"

Lord Varaha replied- "King Vasu was so impressed by Brihaspati's discources that he decided to spend the rest of his life in the service of lord Narayan. He appointed Viwasman- his eldest son as his successor and left for Pushkar tirth. He engaged himself in austere penance by chanting pundarikaksha stotra. One day, while Vasu was chanting Pundarikaksha stotra, he experienced an amazing incident- an entity whose complexion was blue, manifested from his body and stood with folded hands. In his bewilderment, king Vasu requested the stranger to introduce himself.

The entity narrated the following tale to him -

"O King, you were the ruler of Janasthan in your second previous birth. Once, while you had gone deep into the forest on a hunting spree, you were delighted to find a deer which in fact was none other but myself. In fact, I had disguised myself as a deer and was wandering in the forest. Being oblivious of this fact you had killed that dear. Later on, when you realized your mistake, you cursed yourself for having killed an innocent brahmin. To get absolved of this sin, you had observed a fast on Ekadashi and had donated a cow to please lord Narayan. But, in spite of all these austerities you did not attain liberation because at the time of your death you had chanted your wife's name whose name was Narayani instead of Narayan. This blunder of your's had stopped you from attaining to Vishnu loka for one complete kalpa. But, my revengeful soul continued to torture your soul till it was driven out by lord Narayan's escorts. It was only then that you were able to attain to Vishnu loka."

"In your next birth you were born as the king of Kashmir. I did not spare you even in that birth and possessed your body. You performed numerous yagyas to get rid of me but all your efforts went in vain as you had not chanted the holy name of lord Vishnu in any of the rituals that you had performed. But, now I was forced to abandon your body since you have been constantly chanting the sacrosanct pundarikaksha stotra. I have also become absolved of all my sin by the virtue of listening tothe pundarikaksha stotra."

King Vasu expressed his gratitude to the entity for shedding light on his previous births. Suddenly, a divine aircraft descended from the heaven and king Vasu left for Vishnuloka mounted on it. Meanwhile, sage Raimya got the news of Vasu's ascension to heaven to Vishnuloka, he wanted to emulate the feat of his friend. He reached Gaya and performed shradha in the name of his ancestors. He then engaged himself in an austere penance. Sanatkumar-one of the manasputras became very pleased by Raimya's penance and appeared before him. He complimented Raimya for liberating his ancestors by performing shradha at Gaya. He then described the virtues of performing shradha at Gaya and narrated the following tale -

KING VASU AND SAGE RAIMYA UNITE WITH SRI HARI

Prithvi was anxious to know about the effect sage Brihaspati's discources had on King Vasu as well as sage Raimya. She asked lord Varaha- "What did both king Vasu and sage Raimya do after listening to the preachings of sage Brihaspati?"

Lord Varaha replied- "King Vasu was so impressed by Brihaspati's discources that he decided to spend the rest of his life in the service of lord Narayan. He appointed Viwasman- his eldest son as his successor and left for Pushkar tirth. He engaged himself in austere penance by chanting pundarikaksha stotra. One day, while Vasu was chanting Pundarikaksha stotra, he experienced an amazing incident- an entity whose complexion was blue, manifested from his body and stood with folded hands. In his bewilderment, king Vasu requested the stranger to introduce himself.

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"There lived a king named Vishal who had no son. One day, he invited few brahmins to his palace and asked them how he could beget a son. All the brahmins revealed to him that he did not have son because of the curse of his ancestors. "You have not performed their shradha so, they are

angry with you and you can never beget a son unless you performed shradha rituals at Gaya. Vishal went to Gaya as per the instruction of the brahmins. He performed the shradha rituals and offered pinda-dan in the name of his ancestors. While he was still performing the rituals, he was amazed to see three men descending from the sky- one of them was of fair complexion while the remaining two were of wheatish and dark complexion respectively. Vishal curiously asked them as to who they were. The fair-complexioned person replied-

'I am your father- 'sit'. The person with wheatish complexion is my father and the third person amongst us is my grandfather. My father had committed grave sins while he was alive and killing a brahmin was one the gravest sin he had committed. My grandfather was even worst than my father and his dark complexion is nothing as compared to his grave sins. He had killed numerous innocent sages for no fault of theirs. All three of us have come to express our gratitude as we have become liberated from our sins by the virtue of the shradha rituals you have performed. The water which you had offered to us while performing the rituals have given us the ability to communicate with you, even though we are spirits.'

After finishing his tale, Sanatkumar told sage Raimya that Gaya was supreme among all the places of pilgrimage and the virtues of performing shradha over there is incomparable. Sage Raimya dedicated rest of his life to the worship of lord Gadadhar. At last, lord Gadadhar appeared before him. Sage Raimya requested the lord to give him a place in his abode which was dwelled by sages like Sanak and Sanandan. Lord Gadadhar blessed him by saying- 'So be it.' This way, sage Raimya attained enlightenment with the blessings of the merciful lord Gadadhar and ultimately attained to the divine abode of lord Vishnu.

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MATSYA AVATAR

Once, when lord Vishnu awakened from his yoga nidra, he found that the Vedas had submerged in the ocean as the result of Pralaya (deluge). He

incarnated as matsya (fish) to retrieve the Vedas from the ocean-bed. As soon as lord Matsya entered into the ocean, He attained such an enormous size that the deities became frightened.

All the deities then eulogized lord Matsya and requested him to regain his original form- "O Narayan- the imperceivable lord. You manifest yourself in each and every particle of this Universe. You are omnipresent and exist even during the time of deluge when nothing else exist. O Lord! We are scared of your present form."

On seeing the deities frightened, lord Matsya retrieved the Vedas from the sea-bed and transformed his appearance from the huge fish to that of lord Vishnu. The deities were filled with joy to see the divine appearance of lord Vishnu.

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KING DURJAY

During Satya Yuga, there lived a king named Suprateek. Although he had two queens, yet none of them bore any son to him. One day, Suprateek

went to meet sage Durvasa, who had his hermitage at the foothills of Chitrakut mountain and engaged himself in the sevice of Durvasa. The sage blessed the king and prophesised that he would become a proud father of a mighty son named Durjay. Durvasa's prophesy came true and Suprateek's eldest queen- Vidyutprabha gave birth to a son. The child was named Durjay. In course of time Durjay grew up to become a worthy successor of Suprateek. Suprateek decided to spend rest of his life in the service of God, so he went to Chitrakut mountain to do penance.

Mean while, Durjay being an ambitious king expanded his kingdom by subjugating all the neighbouring states. He conquered numerous mighty kingdoms and vanquished almost all the prominent warrior castes like- gandharvas, kinnars, demons and even the deities. Indra- the lord of the deities was defeated by Durjay and was forced to retreat towards east of Sumeru mountain along with the lokpals- various lords protecting different regions of the Universe. The whole world went into turmoil as the fallout of lokpal's power being snatched by Durjay. While Durjay was returning to his capital along with his victorious army, he met two asuras Vidyut and Suvidyut, who had diguised themselves as sages. Both the impersonators requested Durjay to make some alternative arrangements so that the world could function smoothly. In reality, both of them harboured wishes of having the powers of lokpal's so they offered their services in this regard. Durjay, being unaware of their real identity agreed to appoint them as lokpal's and then proceeded towards his capital. While he was passing by the Mandarachal mountain, he saw two beautiful women. Durjay was surprised to find them at such a deserted place. As he stood their wondering about their identity, he saw two hermits approaching him. Both the hermits asked Durjay- "Who are you? What is the purpose of your arrival?

Durjay introduced himself and told them that he was on his way to conquer the whole world. Now it was the turn of both the sages to introduce themselves- "We are the sons of Swayambhuva Manu- Hetu and Prachetu. We had successfully defeated the deities and driven them out from their abode- Sumeru mountain. All the deities went to seek the help of lord Vishnu and were successful in getting his assurance. Lord Vishnu then attacked us and vanquished our army but he spared our lives. Then onwards we became ardent devotees of the merciful lord Vishnu.

Hetu, then pointing towards one of the women said- "She is my daughter Sukeshi. The other woman you see is my brother- Prachetu's daughter and her name is Mishrakeshi. Please accept both these beautiful as your wives."Durjay readily agreed to marry both of them as they were really very beautiful. He then returned to his capital.

Everything was going quite smoothly for Durjay, when on one fateful day he met his downfall because of his extreme greed. The incident happened as follows- Once Durjay had gone into the forest on a hunting spree, where he met a sage named Gaurmukh. Gaurmukh had been blessed by lord Vishnu with a divine diamond named Chintamani which was capable of fulfilling all desires. Gaurmukh gave a royal treatment to Durjay with the help of wish-fulfilling diamond. He created an illusionary palace and offered variety delicacies to him as well as his whole army.

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Durjay wanted to have Chintamani diamond at any cost and therefore sent his minister- Virochan to persuade Gaurmukh to part with that diamond. Gaurmukh became furious after coming to know about the evil intention of Durjay and told Virochan to ask Durjay to leave at once. But

Gaurmukh knew quite well that the greedy Durjay would not give up so easily and would definitely try to acquire Chintamani by force. So he requested Chintamani diamond to create a huge army.

Meanwhile Durjay ordered his chief-commander, named Neel to bring Chintamani at any cost. Neel proceeded with a large number of soldiers. A fierce battle took place between both the armies in which Neel was killed and his army got vanquished. Finally Durjay himself came forward to fight but even he was defeated. In the meantime, Hetu and Prachetu got the news that their son-in-law was in trouble. Both of them proceeded with a huge army to help their son-in-law. But they were no match for the might of their adversary and both of them eventually dieed in the ensuing battle.

Meanwhile sage Gaurmukh found Durjay standing at the entrance of his hermitage with a small number of surviving soldiers. He sought the help of lord Vishnu, who appeared within no time. Gaurmukh requested him to punish Durjay for his evil intention. Lord Vishnu severed Durjay's head with his Sudarshan chakra. The place where Durjay was killed later on became famous as Naimisharanya. Sage Gaurmukh continued to live at Naimisharanya without any problem.

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SHRADHA RITUALS

PITRAS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHRADHA

Once sage Markandeya arrived at Naimisharanya to see sage Gaurmukh. Sage Gaurmukh was delighted to find such an enlightened soul at his hermitage. After the formalities were over, Gaurmukh requested him to shed light on the venerability of ancestors and the significance of shradha rituals.

Sage Markandeya replied- "Lord Brahma, after having created the sapta rishis instructed them to worship him (Lord Brahma) but they became so arrogant that they started to worship themselves. Lord Brahma felt insulted and so he cursed them of becoming bereft of all the knowledge. In course of time, the sapta rishis had numerous sons. After the death of the sapta rishis, all the sons performed shradha so that their souls could rest in peace. The sapta rishis were also famously known as 'Vaimanik' because they had manifested from the mind of Brahma."

Sage Gaurmukh was listening to Markandeya's utterances with rapt attention. He asked about the most appropriate time for performing shradha and also about the number of 'ganas' each of the pitras were supposed to have. Sage Markandeya replied- "Pitras living in the heaven are known as 'somap pitras' are believed to be the most privileged ones among all the pitras. They enjoy the most delicious beverage-somaras. Their lifespan extends for the full period of kalpa and they worship 'marutas'. Sage Marich belongs to this category of pitras."

Pitras belonging to the category of 'vairaj' are revered even by the marutganas. Sanak comes under this categoty of pitras. Each of these pitras have seven ganas. Similarly pitras known as 'bhaswar' have their abode in the world called 'santanak'. These pitras are revered even by the deities as all of them are 'brahma vadis' (one who has realized Brahma). They remanifest themselves after every hundred yugas. People belonging to any caste can worship the revered 'pitras' with an appropriately modified rituals and obviously with the permission of the brahmin. Some of the prominent pitras are 'Vasu', 'Kashyapa', 'Marichi', 'Sanak' etc.

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THE APPROPRIATE TIME FOR PERFORMING SHRADHA

Describing the auspicious time for performing the rituals of shradha, Markandeya told Gurumukh- "A person desirous of performing the

rituals of 'kamya shradha' can do so on any of the following days- a) at the commencement of uttarayan or Dakshainayan. b) at the time when vyatipat yoga takes place, c) at the time when vishu yoga occurs, d) during both solar and lunar eclipses, e) if troubled by the evil influences of a constellation or a planet, f) if troubled by nightmares, g) at the time when the Sun changes its position from one zodiac to another.

The various nakshatras like Anuradha.Vishakha and Shwati are considered to be very auspicious for performing shradha- especially, if the day happens to be amavasya. Shradha performed on such a day pacifies the ancestor's soul for eight years. Similarly the combination of amavasya with either 'pushya nakshatra' or 'punarvasu nakshatra' is believed to pacify the ancstor's soul for twelve years. Some other days which are considered to be very auspicious for performing shradha are- the third day of the bright half of the Hindu month Vaishakh, the nineth day of the bright half of the Hindu month Kartik, the thirteenth day of the dark half of the Hindu month Bhadrapad and amavasya falling in the Hindu month of Magh. A man desirous of performing shradha can do so on any of the above mentioned days. He should take bath in a holy river and offer 'tarpan' (libation) to his ancestors.

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SHRADHA KALPA

Describing the types of Brahmin considered to be elligible to preside over the rituals of shradha, Markandeya told sage Gaurmukh- "The following

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HOW TO INVITE BRAHMINS TO SHRADHA CEREMONY

Invitation should be given to the all the brahmins one day in advance. If invited brahmins arrive to attend the shradha ceremony they should be

treated with due respect. The brahmin who is supposed to perform the rituals should wash the feet of other brahmins to show his respect towards them. He should then help them perform 'achaman' (rinsing of mouth). Finally the invited brahmins should be fed after the rituals have been completed. As far as the number of invited brahmins to the shradha ceremony of the ancestors is concerned, the scriptures have strictly put it to odd numbers-one, three, five, etc. Similarly the number of invited brahmins for the shradha of the deities is concerned the number has been put to even number- two, four, etc. But if the person finds it difficult to invite the above number of brahmins then he can invite only one brahmin for both the types of shradha. While performing the shradha of maternal grandfather it is mandatory to perform the shradha of Vaishyadeva simultaneously. In the shradha ceremony related with the deities the brahmins should always have their food facing east. On the contrary, in the shradha ceremony of the ancestors the brahmins should have their food facing north.

HOW TO INVITE BRAHMINS TO SHRADHA CEREMONY

Invitation should be given to the all the brahmins one day in advance. If invited brahmins arrive to attend the shradha ceremony they should be treated with due respect. The brahmin who is supposed to perform the rituals should wash the feet of other brahmins to show his respect towards them. He should then help them perform 'achaman' (rinsing of mouth). Finally the invited brahmins should be fed after the rituals have been completed. As far as the number of invited brahmins to the shradha ceremony of the ancestors is concerned, the scriptures have strictly put it to odd numbers-one, three, five, etc. Similarly the number of invited brahmins for the shradha of the deities is concerned the number has been put to even number- two, four, etc. But if the person finds it difficult to invite the above number of brahmins then he can invite only one brahmin for both the types of shradha. While performing the shradha of maternal grandfather it is mandatory to perform the shradha of Vaishyadeva simultaneously. In the shradha ceremony related with the deities the brahmins should always have their food facing east. On the contrary, in the shradha ceremony of the ancestors the brahmins should have their food facing north.

TYPES OF SHRADHA AND MANTRA

A person performing the shradha rituals should have his seat made of 'kusha' grass. After taking his seat, he should invoke the deities and make

offerings of 'ardhya' to them. While offering 'ardhya' to the deities water and barley are commonly used along with other articles like sandalwood, incense, etc. During the entire course of shradha rituals sacred thread should be worn in an inverse position- across the right shoulder and not across the left shoulder as it is normally worn. While performing the shradha of ancestors offerings of articles like sesame seeds, water and kusha grass are normally made.

It is customary to scatter sesame seeds near the place where brahmins are having food in the shradha ceremony. The performer of the shradha rituals should imagine that the food partaken by them are actually satiating the ancestors. The chanting of 'Rakshodhna mantra' is a must.

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THE RITUALS OF PINDA DAN AND BALIVAISHVA DEVA

One important characteristic of the rituals connected with pinda dan is the offerings made to manes in the form of sesame seeds and water.

Another important aspect is that 'pinda' is offered on the 'kusha' grass which are kept facing south- first in the name of one's dead father and then in the name of one's grandfather and other ancestors.

The performance of Balivaishva deva rituals mark the end of shradha ceremony after which the person should sit down along with all the invited guests to have his food. Ancestors become satisfied if shradha is performed in their names and all the desires of such a man are fulfilled. Three things have great importance in shradha rituals- black sesame seeds, the auspicious muhurta named 'Kutup' and grandson (daughter's son). Donating silver is considered to be extremely auspicious. A person performing the shradha rituals should not venture out of his house till the completion of the entire ceremony.

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THE MANIFESTATION OF VARIOUS DEITIES

During Treta Yuga, there lived a king named Prajapal. Once while he was on his hunting spree, he entered into a dense forest. He was delighted to

see a dear who started running for its life after hearing the noise. Prajapal let his horse loose in the direction of the running dear. Sage Mahatapa had his hermitage in that forest. While chasing that dear, Prajapal arrived at the hermitage of Mahatapa. Being curious, he entered the hermitage and saw sage Mahatapa. The sage treated his guest with all the respect and offered him fruits to eat. After the formalities were over, Prajapal requested Mahatapa to describe the appropriate way of contemplating on the various forms of lord Narayan which gave salvation to a man. Sage Mahatapa replied- "The Vedas proclaim that all the deities owe their existence to lord Vishnu- Agni, Ashwini Kumars, Gauri, Gajanan, Sheshnag, Kartikeya, Aditya Ganas, Durga, all the 64 matrikas, Kubera, Vayu, Yama, Rudra, Chandrama, Pitra Ganas, etc. have originated from lord Sri Hari. All the deities, although appearing to to have distinct identity, are in fact inseparable from lord Vishnu."

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AGNI

"When Agni manifested himself from Brahma's anger, he requested him (Brahma) to assign an auspicious day to him for his worship. Lord

Brahma said- 'Since you have manifested first of all the deities, therefore the first day (pratipada) will be reserved for your worship. One who performs havan on pratipada would be blessed."

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ASHWINI KUMARS

King Prajapal requested Mahatapa to describe how both the Ashwini Kumars manifested themselves. Sage Mahatapa narrated the following tale- Marichi was Lord Brahma's son while Kashyapa was Marichi's son. All the twelve Adityas are the sons of sage Kashyapa. One of the Adityas- Martand, was marrird to Vishwakarma's daughter whose name was Sangya. Martand had two children from her and their names were- Yama and Yami. Being unable to bear the extreme radiance of Martand, Sangya created her shadow identity and after instructing her to serve her husband (Martand) in best possible ways, she herself went to live at Uttarkuru. Later on, when Martand came to know about the reality, he went to Uttarkuru and found Sangya in the form of a mare. He then changed his own form and became a horse. Both of them stayed there for a long time. In course of time, Sangya gave birth to two sons who became famous as Ashwini Kumars.'

Martand instructed both his sons to please lord Brahma with their devotion. Both of them engaged themselves in austere penance. Finally lord Brahma appeared and blessed both of them by saying- 'Your good-looks and knowledge of ayurveda will be unmatched in the world.' It was 'dwitiya' (second day) when lord Brahma had blessed both the Ashwini Kumars. This is the reason why this particular day is the reason why this particular day is deeply attached with the worship of Ashwini Kumars.'

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GODDESS PARVATI

King Prajapal asked Mahatapa about the reason why goddess Gauri- the epithet of power, had to take incaranation. Sage Mahatapa replied -

"Goddess Gauri manifested from lord Narayan and was offered to Rudra as his consort by lord Brahma. Lord Brahma then instructed Brahma to begin creation but Rudra being free from all kinds of worldly attachment refused to oblige lord Brahma and engaged himself in austere penance. Goddess Gauri then merged her identity with Brahma, who later on created his seven 'manas-putras'. In course of time, Gauri was born as the daughter of Daksha Prajapati and hence came to be known as 'Dakshayani'.

Once Daksha Prajapati organised a grand yagya in which all the seven manasputras were assigned specific responsibilities. Meanwhile Rudra came out from his meditation and was extremely furious to see the earth occupied by countless creatures. He thought- 'Brahma had requested me to create then who is responsible for all these creation? Who has dared to transgress my authority?' As Rudra stood wondering, suddenly he heard the sound of the mantras being chanted at the yagya performed by Daksha. Now, Rudra's fury crossed all limits resulting into the emergence of numerous spirits and ghosts from his ears. He then went to the oblation-site accompanied by the ghosts and started destroying it. Lord Vishnu tried to protest as a result of which a fierce battle was fought between both of them. It was only on lord Brahma's intervention that both of them stopped fighting. Lord Brahma said- 'From now onwards Rudra would become famous as 'Har' while Vishnu would be known as 'Hari'. He then directed the deities to eulogize Rudra and give his due share of the yagya being performed by Daksha Prajapati.'

Rudra became pleased by deities's eulogy and blessed them. This way Daksha Prajapati was able to accomplish his yagya with the blessings of Rudra. In course of time, Rudra married Gauri- the daughter of Daksha Prajapati. Once, Gauri went to her father's place to attend a yagya ceremony against the wish of her husband. On seeing her, Daksha Prajapati started cursing Rudra. Gauri was so enraged by her father's attitude that she gave up her life by jumping into the sacrificial fire meant for the yagya. Later on, she took rebirth as Parvati- the daughter of Himalaya. Parvati did an austere penance to get Shiva as her husband. Ultimately her desire was fulfilled and she became the consort of lord Shiva.

The tithi of tritiya is very deeply attached with the worship of goddess

Parvati because all the important events of her life (birth, marriage, etc.) took place on this day. This is the reason why tritiya is attributed to the worship of goddess Parvati. A woman who observes a fast on this day enjoys a blissful married life. One important ritual related with the austerity of tritiya is avoiding the usage of salt on this day.

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LORD GANAPATI

King Prajapal then asked sage Mahatapa about the manifestation of lord Ganapati and about the significance of chaturthi in terms of Ganapati's

worship. Mahatapa narrated the following tale-"Once all the deities went to seek Shiva's help in sorting out a peculiar problem they were faced with- while they experienced all sorts of hurdles and problems in their work resulting into repeated failures in their work, the demons on the contrary accomplished all their work successfully without any problem. When lord Shiva learnt about their problem, he burst into laughter. Hardly had he stopped laughing than a radiant adolescent manifested himself from his opened mouth. The child was so divinely charming that Parvati, who was sitting beside Shiva looked at him without dropping her eyelids. When Shiva found her staring at the child he became jealous. Jealousy transformed into anger and Shiva cursed the child- 'From now onwards your face will resemble an elephant and your belly will become large as a pot. In the name of yagyopavit you would have nothing but a snake hanging across your shoulder.'

The child was none other than Ganesh. Lord Shiva's anger did not subside even after having cursed Ganesh. He was still trembling in anger and was sweating profusely. Numerous Ganeshas manifested themselves from those sweat-drops and each of them had a head of an elephant as well as a large belly. Suddenly, lord Brahma appeared and requested lord Shiva by saying- 'You should make this divine child, who has manifested from your mouth, the lord of all these Vinayakas. Thus lord Shiva made Ganesh the lord of all the Vinayakas and blessed him- You will be the first deity to get worshipped in any ritual.'

Chaturthi has deep association with the worship of lord Ganesh, as it was on this very day that he had manifested himself. Having prasad, prepared from sesame seeds and worshipping lord Ganesh on this day is believed to bring great auspiciousness. A devotee who worships lord Ganesh on chaturthi never experiences any kind of obstacle in his work.

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NAG DEVTA

King Prajapal then requested Mahatapa to shed light on the origin of the serpents and the significance of 'panchami'. Sage Mahatapa replied- The

serpents came from the lineage of Kadru-Kashyapa's wife. Sage Kashyapa had numerous progeny from Kadru-Vasuki, Anant, Kambal, Karkotak, Padma, Mahapadma, Shankh, Kulik, etc. When all these serpents started tormenting human-beings, lord Brahma cursed them that they would be annihilated during swayambhuva manvantar due to the curse of their own mother.

The serpents became terrified and promised to mend their ways. They then requested lord Brahma to give them a place to live in. Lord Brahma instructed them to go to three different netherworlds- Sutal, Vital and Patal. He also warned them that during Vaivaswat manvantar Janmejay would perform a grand yagya with the objective of destroying the wicked serpents but the virtuous among them would manage to survive. This particular incident had occured on panchami and hence it became the destroyer of all sins. A devotee who worships 'Nag' (serpent) on this day and offers milk will never be troubled by them.

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KARTIKEYA

Describing Kartikeya's manifestation and how his worship got associated with the auspicious day of shashthi, sage Mahatapa told king Prajapal-

Once a fierce battle was between the deities and demons in which the deities got defeated. The reason behind their defeat was the absence was the absence of an able commander who could lead them. The deities went to seek the help of lord Brahma. Being unable to solve their problem, lord Brahma took the deities to lord Shiva.

Lord Shiva invoked 'Shakti' present within his body and thus manifested lord Kartikeya. He was named after the six 'Kritikas' who had nurtured him by feeding their breast milk. Lord Shiva then made Kartikeya the commander of the deities on the auspicious day of shashthi. Under his able leadership, the deities finally managed to defeat the demons.

A devotee who worships lord Kartikeya on shashthi enjoys prosperity and gets all his desire fulfilled. A childless couple must worship on this auspicious day to get blessed with a son.

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LORD ADITYA

King Prajapal asked Mahatapa- "The thought of divine radiance taking the form of human radiance bewilders me. Please clear my doubts."

Sage Mahatapa replied - "When the almighty God willed to manifest himself in other tangible forms, an effulgence emanated from his being resulting into the creation of 'Surya' (The Sun). The whole world became illumined with Surya's radiance and all the deities dwelling within the body of Almighty God expressed their gratitude. Initially, unbearable heat emanated from 'Surya', causing great uncomfort to the deities but later on Almighty God reduced it to bearable limit at the request of the deities. Surya had manifested himself on the auspicious day of'saptami' hence this particular day became deeply associated with the worship of Surya.

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ASHTA MATRIKAS

Continuing with his narration, sage Mahatapa said - "During ancient times, there lived a mighty demon named 'Andhakasur'. Andhakasur had

become arrogant because of a boon of immortality received from lord Brahma. Being tormented by Andhakasur, all the deities went to seek lord Brahma's help. Lord Brahma took the deities to lord Shiva who agreed to kill the wicked demon-Andhakasur.

The battle commenced and a fierce dual fight broke out between Lord Shiva and Andhakasur. Shiva attacked Andhakasur with his trident. Stream of blood oozed out from the wound, but to Shiva's utter amazement each drop of blood falling on the ground resulted in into the creation of numerous Andhakasuras. In a short time the battlefield was overcrowded with countless Andhakasuras. Now Shiva's anger crossed all limits and he thundered loudly. Flames emanated from the mouth of enraged Shiva resulting into the manifestation of goddess 'Yogishwari'. Similarly, seven more goddesses manifested themselves from different deities- Vaishnavi from lord Vishnu, Brahmi from lord Brahma, Kaumari from Kartikeya, Mahendri from Indra, Yami from Yama, Varahai from lord Varaha and Maheshwari from lord Narayan. All these eight goddesses came to be known as 'Matrikas' and lord assigned them the auspicious day for their worship. A devotee who worships these eight matrikas on ashtami is blessed. The use of 'bael' (wood-apple) fruit on this day has great significance.

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GODDESS DURGA

King Prajapal requested sage Mahatapa to narrate about the manifestation of goddess Durga and the significance of her worship on

navami. Sage Mahatapa replied- The mighty demon-Vetrasur had driven out deities from the heaven. All the deities went to lord Brahma and sought his help. As lord Brahma was wondering about his further course of action, suddenly goddess Durga appeared from nowhere. She held various weapons in each of her eight arms and was mounted on a ferocious lion. Lord Brahma was relieved as he was confident that Goddess Durga would certainly kill Vretasur. Finally goddess Durga indeed killed the dreaded demon without much difficulty. Later on, all the deities requested her to make Himalaya mountain as her abode to which she agreed. This particular place, in course of time became famous as Nandadevi. One who worships goddess Durga on the auspicious day of navami gets her blessings.

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DASH DISHAS

Having finished the tale of goddess Durga, sage Mahatapa revealed how all the six directions came into existence- "Six divine women manifested

themselves from both the ears of lord Brahma during the initial phase of creation. The name of these six divine women were Purva (east), Dakshaina (south), Paschima (west), Uttara (north), Urdhva (upwards) and Adhara (downwards). In course of time all of them got married to six different Lokpals. Lord Brahma assigned the auspicious day of dashami for their worship. One who worships all these six goddesses on the auspicious day of dashami is blessed and one who observes fast on this day gets absolved of all his sins.

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KUBERA

Continuing with the tales of the manifestation of various deities, sage Mahatapa said- "In the process of doing his creation, lord Brahma

bellowed as a result of which Kubera manifested himself. Lord Brahma assigned Kubera the lordship of all the wealth and prosperity. It was 'ekadashi' when Kubera had manifested himself, so this particular day has deep association with his worship. One who observes a fast on the auspicious day of ekadashi never lives in poverty."

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LORD VISHNU

Describing how lord Vishnu manifested, sage Mahatapa told Prajapal - "Narayan- the almighty God incarnated as lord Vishnu to nurture all the

living creatures inhabiting the world. Eventually lord Vishnu entrusted the job of world's welfare to goddess Yoganidra and himself went into his meditative sleep. While he was still in his meditative sleep, a lotus flower emanated from his navel. Lord Brahma was seated on that lotus flower.

The almighty God was delighted to see himself in the incarnation of Vishnu. He blessed Vishnu by saying- 'May you destroy all kind of ignorance with the help of your sword. Hold this chakra I am giving you, to sever the evil influences of 'kal-chakra' (wheel of time). May all the sins be destroyed by your mace. May the deity-Vayu adorn your hand in the form of a conch and vaijyanti mala in your neck. May the Sun and Moon adorn your person in the form of Srivatsa and kaustubh diamonds. May Garuda be your mount and goddess Lakshmi your consort. May people desirous of salvation worship you on the auspicious day of dwadashi. One who worship you on this day will definitely attain to the heaven.'

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DHARMA

Sage Mahatapa then told king Mahapal about the manifestation of Dharma and the significance of trayodashi- 'Dharma manifested himself

from the right part of almighty God and appeared like a bullock. The almighty God instructed him to protect the mankind from all evils and sins. All the four feet of Dharma signified four various virtues- truth, purity, penance and charity. In Satya Yuga, Dharma was four footed- all the four virtues were prevalent during that era. In Treta Yuga, the feet of Dharma reduced to three. The subsequent eras of Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga saw the further decline in virtuosity in which Dharma had two feet and one foot respectively.'

'Once a fierce battle was fought between the deities and demons. The bone of contention was a woman for whom both the side made claims. Dharma intervened and solved the contentious issue to the satisfaction of both the warring sides. Lord Brahma was very impressed by the deftness with which Dharma had handled such a tough situation and blessed him by saying-1 am assigning the auspicious day of tryodashi to you. One who observes a fast and worship you on this day will be liberated from all his sins.'

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LORD RUDRA

Sage Mahatapa then went on to describe the incident that led to the manifestation of lord Rudra and the significance of chaturdashi- 'In the

beginning of creation, when lord Brahma failed in his repeated attempts to create, he became frustrated. Frustration turned into fury and from his fury manifested a divine entity who cried incessantly. Lord Brahma tried to stop him from crying and said- tvam ma rud (don't cry). This is how lord Rudra got his name. Lord Brahma then requested Rudra to commence creation but since Rudra lacked the power needed for doing creation therefore he refused and went to do penance. Later on, lord Brahma created his manasputras and other living creatures. Daksha Prajapati was one of these manasputras. Once he had organised a grand yagya in which all the deities and even the demons had been invited.'

Meanwhile, Rudra's penance was disturbed by the constant chanting of the mantras at the yagya performed by Daksha Prajapati. Rudra was infuriated resulting into the emanation of flames from his mouth. Eventually these fire-balls got transformed into ferocious spirits and ghosts. Rudra then reached the place where the yagya was being performed and with the help of all the spirits and ghosts started destoying the oblation site. It was only after lord Brahma's intervention that Rudra calmed down. All the deities then eulogized Rudra and sought his blessings. One who worships lord Rudra on the auspicious day of chaturdashi becomes absolved of all his sins.

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TANMATRAS

Describing the importance of amavasya, sage Mahatapa told Prajapal- "Once, while lord Brahma was just about to commence the process of

creation, suddenly 'tanmatras' (subtle forms of matter) revealed themselves from his mind. All of them being extremely virtuous were eager to go up in the sky to do penance because lord Brahma requested them to become the 'pitras' (ancestors) of the human beings. All the tanmatras then requested Brahma to make arrangement for their sustenance. Lord Brahma blessed them by saying- 'I assign to you the auspicious day of amavasya. Anybody who performs the rituals of 'tarpan' (libation) on this day would become absolved of his sins. You would sustain yourselves on various things like water, sesame seeds, and kusha grass which are offered by human beings to their ancestors on this day.'

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CHANDRAMA

Describing the importance of pumima sage Mahatapa said- "Daksha Prajapati had cursed Chandrama, his son-in-law for maltreating his

daughters. As the fallout of that curse Chandrama started waning day by day and eventually became invisible on amavasya. All the deities became worried and went to seek lord Vishnu's help. Lord Vishnu advised them to get the ocean churned. While the ocean was being churned, Chandrama once again manifested himself from the ocean. Lord Brahma then assigned the auspicious day of pumima to him and blessed him. A devotee should observe a fast on purnima and worship Chandrama for the attainment of kowledge, prosperity aswell as salvation.

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AUSTERITIES ASSOCIATED WITH LORD VISHNU'S INCARNATIONS

MATSYA-DWADASHI VRATA

Matsya-dwadashi is celebrated on the twelfth day of Hindu month-Margashirsh. On this auspicious day a devotee should worship lord Matsya- the incarnation of lord Vishnu with appropriate rituals and give charity to brahmins. Prithvi was the first one to observe this particular austerity while she was being abducted to rasatala by a mighty demon named Hiranyaksha. A devotee who observes a fast on this day and worships lord Matsya with appropriate rituals attains to Brahma loka and remains there for eternity. Such a person attain's a divine body when creation recommences after the period of deluge. An issueless woman is blessed with a virtuous son if she observes a fast on this day. Matsya-dwadashi is capable of absolving a man even of the gravest of his sin.

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KURMA-DWADASHI VRATA

This particular austerity is dedicated to the worship of lord Kurma- the incarnation of lord Vishnu. It is celebrated on the twelfth day of the

bright half of the Hindu month 'pausha'. The austerity which commences on the tenth day itself when a devotee is supposed to purify himself by taking a holy bath. On the following day he observes a fast and worships lord Kurma with appropriate rituals. He breaks his fast on dwadashi which marks the conclusion of the austerity. A devotee who observes a fast on this auspicious day becomes absolved of all his sins and attains salvation.

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VARAHA-DWADASHI VRATA

Varaha dwadashi is celebrated on the twelfth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-magh. This was the day on which Prithvi had been rescued

by lord Varaha- the incarnation of lord Vishnu. An idol of lord Varaha is installed on a pot filled with water and worshipped with appropriate rituals amidst the continuous chanting of the mantra-'om Varahay namah'. Offerings of various articles are made while worshipping lord Varaha -sandalwood, incense, naivedya, etc. After the accomplishment of the rituals brahmins are fed and charity given to them. One who observes a fast on this day enjoys a good health and prosperity. Such a man becomes absolved of all his sins and attains to heaven after his death.

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NRISIMHA-DWADASHI VRATA

This austerity is observed on the twelfth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-phalgun. A devotee should observe fast on this day and

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VAMANA-DWADASHI VRATA

Vamana dwadashi is celebrated on the twelfth day of the bright half of the Hindu month- chaitra. A devotee should observe a fast and worship lord Vamana by saying the following prayer- "O Lord! Vamana- the dwarfish incarnation of the almighty Vishnu, who took incarnation on the auspicious day of dwadashi in the month of chaitra-1 seek your blessings." One who observes a fast on this day is blessed and protected from all kinds of danger.

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JAMDAGNYA-DWADASHI VRATA

This austerity is related with the worship of lord Parshurama who is also famous as Jamdagnya. It is celebrated on the twelfth day of the bright

half of the Hindu month-vaishakh. Before commencing the rituals, a devotee should purify himself by taking a bath and then worship an idol of lord Parshurama kept on a pot filled with water. While worshipping he should make offerings of various articles to the deity- flowers, sandalwood, ardhya, etc. It is mandatory to remain awake for the whole night. On the following day, he should donate the idol to a brahmin. A devotee who observes a fast on this day gets all his wishes fulfilled and attains to Brahma loka.

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KALKI-DWADASHI VRATA

A devotee should commence this austerity by observing a fast on the eleventh day of the bright half of the Hindu month-bhadrapad and break

it on the following day-dwadashi. He should worship lord Kalki with appropriate rituals. As per the norms of the rituals, the idol of lord Kalki is placed on a pot which is filled with water. This idol is donated to a learned brahmin on the following day-trayodashi.

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PADMANABH-DWADASHI VRATA

This austerity is related with the worship of lord Padmanabh- an epithet of lord Vishnu and is observed on the twelfth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-ashwin. One important charecteristic of the ritual is that all the organs of lord Padmanabh is worshipped. The idol is placed on a pot filled with water and while worshipping offerings of various articles are made-flowers, fruits, sandalwood, etc. On the following day the idol is donated to a brahmin. One who observes a fast on this day enjoys a prosperous life and attains to the abode of lord Padmanabh.

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DHARNI-VRATA

This particular austerity is observed in the Hindu month of Kartik. The rituals commence by worshipping various organs of lord Narayan amidst

the chanting of different mantras which are as follows-

1. om sahastra shirse namah - head 2. om Purushay namah - arms 3. om vishwa rupine namah - throat 4. om Jnanastray namah - weapons 5. om Sri vatsaya namah - chest 6. om jagad grasishnave namah - abdomen 7. om divya murtaye namah - waist 8. om sahastra paday namah - feet.

Similarly, Sri Krishna dwadashi is celebrated in the Hindu month of Ashadh, shukla- paksha. A devotee should worship lord Krishna on this day and observe a fast.

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BUDDHA-DWADASHI VRATA

Lord Buddha is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The austerity begins on the eleventh day of the bright half of the Hindu

month-Shravana. On this day lord Vishnu is worshipped with appropriate rituals and by making offerings of various articles like flowers, fruits, incense, etc. The following mantras should be chanted while worshipping the various organs of lord Vishnu -

1. om damodaray namah - feet 2. om hrishikeshay namah - waist 3. om sanatanay namah - abdomen 4. om Sri vatsadharine namah - chest 5. om chakrapanaye namah - arms 6. om haraye namah - throat 7. om manju keshay namah - head 8. om bhadray namah - top-knot (shikha).

After the accomplishment of the rituals, the idol should be donated to a brahmin.

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7. om manju keshay namah - head 8. om bhadray namah - top-knot (shikha).

After the accomplishment of the rituals, the idol should be donated to a brahmin.

SUBH-VRATA

This particular austerity on the first day of the Hindu month-margashirsh. It is related with the worship of lord Vishnu and the rituals

have some special characteristics- having one meal on the eleventh day of the month (ekadashi), donating barley to brahmins, worshipping the idol of goddess Prithvi on 'ekadashi', etc. The austerity concludes on dwadashi. On ekadashi, goddess Prithvi is also worshipped along with lord Vishnu. Both the idols are installed side by side and covered with white clothes. After that some rice grains are scattered in front of both the idols. As per the norms of the rituals, a devotee is required to remain awake for the whole night. Next morning, he should invite twenty-four brahmins and feed them. He should also donate a cow, apparels, ornaments, an umbrella, woodden sandle and similar articles to them. A devotee who observes a fast on this auspicious day enjoys prosperity.

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DHANYA-VRATA

This particular austerity is a form of 'nakta-vrata', which means observing fast for the whole day and breaking it in the night. The austerity

commences on the first day of the bright half of the Hindu month-aghan and lasts for a year. Rituals include worshipping Agnideva- an embodiment of lord Vishnu, chanting of certain mantras praising the glory of the deity and performing 'havan'. There are specific instructions on the type of food a devotee should have during the course of this austerity- for four months (chaitra to ashadh) he should have delicacies like ’kheer' seasoned in pure ghee. From Shravana to kartik he should have food-items prepared from gram flour. This way, the austerity lasts for one year whereby a devotee observes fast on the first day of every month that follows. The austerity concludes by worshipping an idol of lord Agni made of gold. The idol is adorned with a piece of red-cloth and red-flowers are offered to the deity while worshipping. After the rituals are accomplished, the idol should be donated to a brahmin. The observance of this particular austerity brings good fortune to a man and makes him prosperous.

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KANTI-VRATA

This austerity is related with the worship of Sri Krishna and Balarama. It commences on the second day of the bright half of the Hindu month-

kartik and lasts for a year whereby a devotee observes fast on the second day (bright half) of every month that follows. While worshipping Balarama, a devotee should chant- 'om baldevay namah' and while worshipping Sri Krishna he should chant- 'om keshavay namah'. Subsequently, 'ardhya' is offered to both the deities. A devotee should have food prepared from barley-flour in the night but those devotees who have resolved to observe this austerity for four months beginning from 'falgun' should live only on 'kheer'. Offerings of rice and sesame seeds are made in the sacrificial- fire during the months of 'aghan' and 'kartik' respectively. The rituals conclude by worshipping the deity 'Chandrama' at the end of the year. Finally all the three idols (Sri Krishna, Balarama and Chandrama) should be donated to brahmins. A devotee who observes this austerity is bestowed with a charming personality.

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SAUBHAGYA-VRATA

This austerity commences on the third day of the bright half of the Hindu month-falgun and lasts for a year whereby a devotee observes fast on the

third day (bright half) of every month that follows. According to the tradition a devotee can either worship 'Shiva-Parvati' or 'Sri Hari-Lakshmi on this auspicious day. While worshipping, the devotee should chant the following mantras- om gambhiray namah, om saubhagyay namah, om devdevay namah, om trinetray namah, om vachaspataye namah, om rudray namah, etc. One important feature of the rituals is making offerings of honey and ghee to the sacrificial fire. During the course of the rituals, a devotee should have food prepared from pure cereals preferably wheat. After the rituals are accomplished at the end of the year, the idols should be donated to brahmins. One who observes this austerity is blessed with good fortune in his successive seven births.

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AVIGHNA-VRATA

As the name implies, this austerity clears all the obstacles faced by a man. It commences on the fourth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-

falgun and lasts for four months whereby a devotee observes fast on the fourth day (bright half) of every month that follows. One important characteristic of this austerity is the importance and use of sesame seeds in its rituals. It is not only the chief constituent of the diet but it is also offered in the sacrificial fire and donated to the brahmins as well. After observing this austerity for four months, a devotee should conclude it by worshipping lord Ganesh in the fifth month and donating the Ganesh-idol to a brahmin alongwith five pots filled with sesame seeds. While worshipping lord Ganesh, he should chant the following mantras- om shooray namah, om dhiray namah, om gajananay namah, om lambodaray namah, om ekdanshtray namah, etc. A devotee thus becomes free from every obstacle and gets all his wishes.

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SHANTI-VRATA

This austerity commences on the fifth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-kartik and lasts for a year whereby a devotee observes fast on the

fifth day (bright half) of the every month that follows. It is related with the worship of lord Vishnu and Sheshnag. A devotee should abstain from hot and spicy food during the course of this austerity. Lord Vishnu's idol is purified by chanting mantras and by performing ablution with milk. Offerings of sesame seeds and milk are made in the sacrificial fire. After the accomplishment of the rituals at the year end, brahmins are invited and fed. Finally the idol of Sheshnag is donated to one of them. A devotee who performs this austerity becomes free from all kinds of turbulence in his life and experiences peace and tranquility.

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KAM-VRATA

This austerity is related with the worship of lord Kartikeya and is observed in the bright half of the Hindu month-pausha. On the sixth day

of this month, a devotee is expected to live on nothing else but fruits. Lord Kartikeya is also known by several other names- Shadanan, Senani, Kritikasut, Kumar, Skand, etc. The austerity concludes by feeding the brahmins at the year end and making donations to them. A devotee who observes this austerity gets all his wishes fulfilled.

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AROGYA-VRATA

This austerity is related with the worship of lord Surya Narayan who is also known by several other names like Aditya, Bhaskar, Ravi, Bhanu,

Diwakar, Prabhakar, etc. A devotee should observe a fast on the seventh day of any month and worship lord Suryanarayan. The fast should be broken on the next day- ashtami. A devotee can continue this ritual for one year following the above mentioned rituals. A devotee who observes the rituals of this austerity becomes free from all kind of diseases and enjoys a healthy life.

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PUTRA-PRAPTI VRATA

This austerity commences on the eighth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-bhadrapad. The rituals consist of taking a 'sankalpa' on the

preceding day (saptami) and worshipping lord Sri Hari on the next day with appropriate rituals. Offerings are made to the sacrificial fire, which usually consist of articles like barley, sesame seeds, ghee, etc. The austerity concludes by feeding the invited brahmins and making donations to them. This way the austerity continues for a year whereby a devotee observes fast on 'ashtami' of every month. A sonless person is blessed with a son if he observes this austerity with total devotion. This austerity which is popularly known as 'Krishna ashtami' also helps a devotee to become absolved of gravest of sin.

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SHAURYA AND SARVA BHAUM VRATA

Shaurya and Sarva Bhaum vrata is related with the worship of goddess Durga and is observed on the nineth day of the bright half of the Hindu

month-ashvin. The rituals commence by taking a 'sankalpa' as well as observing a fast on the preceding day (saptami). The fast is broken on the next day (ashtami) by having fruits. Cereals are excluded from the diet. One important aspect of this austerity is the worship of virgin girls along with goddess Durga. One who observes the rituals of this austerity attains power valour and strength. Sarva bhaum vrata is related with the worship of all the ten directions, considered as goddesses. A fast is observed on the tenth day of the bright half of the Hindu month-kartik and lasts for a year whereby a devotee observes fast on the tenth day (bright half) of every month that follows. One important charecteristic of this fast is that it is broken at the end of the day by having rice and curd. Making sacrifices in the name of all the ten directions are the inseparable part of this austerity. A devotee who observes this austerity lasting for a year remains invincible in whatever he does.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DHENU DAN

TIL DHENU-DAN

As the name implies, an idol of a cow made from powdered sesame seeds is donated to a brahmin. The idol should weigh not less than sixteen 'prasthas' (one prastha=four kudav, ancient units of weight measurment) Similarly a calfs idol made from powdered sesame seeds and weighing four 'prasthas' is donated to a brahmin. Apart from these idols ofcow and calf a devotee should also donate 'deer-skin'. While donating these things, he should pray in the following way-'O Til dhenu! Bless me so that I enjoy prosperity and never experience scarcity of any kind in my life.' The brahmin receiving the donation should express his gratitude in the following way- O goddess! I am receiving you in all humility. Bless and nurture my whole family.' A person who donates 'Til Dhenu' gets all his wishes fulfilled and attains to Vishnu loka after his death.

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JAL-DHENU DAN

The method of donating 'Jal Dhenu' is as follows-first of all small area of land is purified by coating it with cow dung and place two small pots are

placed at the center. These pots are filled with different things like water, camphor, sandalwood, etc. The devotee should then imagine goddess Jal Dhenu and her calf to be dwelling in those pots respectively. Both the pots are adequately adorned with various articles like sandalwood, flowers and then worshipped. After the completion of the rituals both the idols are donated to brahmins. A person who donates Jal Dhenu or a brahmin who accepts it attains to Vishnu loka after being absolved of all his sins.

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RASA DHENU DAN

First of all, the area is purified by coating it with cow-dung after which a black deer-skin is spread on it alongwith 'kusha grass'. Two pots- one

large and the other a small one are placed side by side. These pots are filled with sugarcane juice and symbolize 'Rasa-Dhenu' and the calf. Four sugarcanes symbolizing the four legs of 'Rasa-Dhenu' are fixed at four comers. After that, one small silver piece is placed at the base of each of the sugarcanes symbolizing hoofs. Rasa-Dhenu is then adorned with colourful cloths and flowers. Again, four small pots filled with sesame seeds are kept at the four corners near Rasa-Dhenu. After the worship is accomplished, Rasa-Dhenu is donated to a brahmin. A person who donates Rasa-Dhenu is liberated from all his sins and all his ancestors as well as the generations to come attain to the Heaven.

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GUD-DHENU DAN

As it is amply clear by the name, in this ritual some jaggery is taken and given the shape of a cow and a calf. The land is purified by coating it with

cow-dung. After that, a black deer-skin is spread on that purified area. Some kusha grass are then spread on the deer-skin and covered with a piece of cloth. Now, both the idols of cow and its calf are worshipped with appropriate rituals after which they are donated to brahmins. A devotee should also should also donate shoes, umbrella and if possible, a gold ring to brahmins. Donating a Gud-Dhenu enables a man to attain to such divine world where sages and hermits dwell. By doing thus,he also liberates his ancestors and the future generations.

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SHARKARA-DHENU DAN

In this ritual, idols of a cow and a calf are made from sugar. After being worshipped they should be donated to a brahmin. A devotee should live

only on sugar for a day. Donating aSharkara-Dhenu liberates a man from all his sins. Similarly, donating Madhu-Dhenu (made from honey), Kheer-Dhenu (made from rice and milk), Dadhi-Dhenu (curd), Navneet-Dhenu (made from butter), Lavan-Dhenu (salt) and Karpas-Dhenu (cotton) are all believed to bestow incomparable virtues to a devotee.

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SACRED PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

KOKAMUKH TIRTH

Describing the holiness of Kokamukh tirth, lord Vara ha narrated a tale to Prithvi-"Once a fisherman was trying to catch a large fish in a lake situated at Kokamukh. Suddenly a hawk which was flying in the sky, descended down and after picking the fish in its beak tried to fly away. But as the fish was a large one, the hawk could not hold it for too long. As a result, the hawk fell on the ground being unable to bear the weight of the fish. But amazingly, the hawk turned into a handsome prince as soon as it touched the ground."

"In the meantime, the fisherman's wife arrived there carrying some meat-pieces in her hand. A kite, which was flying in the sky tried to snatch those meat-pieces. Seeing this, the fisherman killed that kite with one shot of his arrow. In course of time, the kite took rebirth as a princess of Chandrapur. She was extremely beautiful but hated men. Similarly, the fish was reborn as a prince. As the destiny would have liked it, both of them got married. There was a dramatic change in the attitude of the princess after the marriage as she no longer hated men. On the contrary, she loved her husband so much that she dreaded the thought of separation for even a moment."

"One day, the prince had a severe headache which showed no sign of subsiding. The princess became very worried and summoned the royal physician. The physician left no stone unturned to cure his royal physician but without any success. Somehow, the prince remembered everything about his previous birth and had a firm belief that he would be cured of his illness once he reached Kokamukh- the sacrosanct place of pilgrimage. So he decided to go there accompanied by the princess."

"Both of them reached a place at Kokamukh where they saw the remains (skeleton) of a fish lying on the ground. The prince revealed to his wife that he was a fish in his previous birth and that the skeleton was his. Then he went on to describe the cause of his headache which according to him was due to the injury sustained in his past birth when he had been badly mauled by a hawk. The princess was aware of her past birth as a kite, so she revealed how she had been killed by a fisherman in her previous birth. She also told her husband - 'Dying at Kokamukh in my previous birth prove to be a blessing to me as I was reborn as a princess. Had it not been so, I would certainly have not bom as a princess." "Both of them worshipped lord Vishnu and as a result the prince was cured of

his severe headache. Such is the greatness of Kokamukh- the reliever of all pains and miseries."

MAYAPURI (HARIDWAR)

Narrating about the sanctity of Mayapuri, lord Varaha told Prithvi- "There lived a brahmin named Somsharma at Mayapuri. He was a great devotee of mine (lord Sri Hari) and had an impossible desire of witnessing my divine powers by his mortal eyes. I tried to make him understand about the futility of his desire but to no avail. Finally I was left with no option but to fulfil his wish. One day Somsharma had gone to take his bath in the holy Ganges. Hardly had he taken a dip than he found himself experiencing the pangs of birth in the womb of a nishad woman. Evidently, lord Sri Hari had began giving a glimpse of his divine powers to Somsharma. It was a terrible experience for him and he vowed to lead a chaste life as soon as he came out of the womb." "Unfortunately, he forgot everything about his vow once he took rebirth as a girl.

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In course of time, the girl grew up and married a young nishad. She had many children from him. One day, the nishad girl who in reality was Somsharma, went to take a bath in the holy Ganges. As soon as she entered into the river, she got transformed into a hermit. She was filled

with extreme bewilderment but this was not the end, as there were more surprises to come."

"The hermit (previously nishad and originally Somsharma) came out of the river and looked all around in amazement. He then sat down to meditate and very soon he was engrossed in his meditation. In the evening, some sages arrived and said- 'Sir! How come you are sitting here? You had gone to take a bath. We became anxious and started searching for you when you did not return till evening." "The hermit was bewildered by the turn of events as he was aware of every incident that had occured. He was also well aware that he had spent fifty years as nishad-woman, but according to the statements of hermits he had been absent only for few hours. The hermit was totally confused about his real identity. I (lord Varaha) felt pity on his miserable condition and decided to lift my magic spell. I asked him whether his wish of witnessing my divine powers had been fulfilled or not. The hermit eulogized me and agreed that it was impossible for any mortal to understand the ways of Aimighty. I then blessed him and transformed him into Somsharma once again." Such is the grandeur of Mayapuri- the sacrosanct place where lord Sri Hari has manifested his divine powers. A devotee who goes on a pilgrimage to Mayapuri never gets entangeled in the worldly illusions.

KUBJAMRAK TIRTH (HRISHIKESH)

Describing how Kubjamrak tirth derived its name, lord Varaha told Prithvi- "In Satya Yuga, at the time when the earth was still submerged in water, I had killed two mighty demons named Madhu and Kaitabh. After killing both the demons I looked all around and found sage Raimya engrossed in his penance. Sage Raimya was a great devotee of mine. I was extremely impressed and watched him hiding myself behind a mango tree. The mango tree could not bear the weight of my hands and became curved. This is how Kubjamrak tirth derived its name. Very soon, sage Raimya found out that I was hiding behind that mango tree. He eulogized me and requested me to to grant a special status to Kubjamrak tirth among all the holy places. I blessed him and thus Kubjamrak tirth became one of the holiest places. There are several other holy places situated in the vicinity of Kubjamrak tirth, Manas tirth, Maya tirth, Sarvakamik tirth, Purnamukh tirth, Agni tirth, Shukra terth, Manasar tirth, Sapta samudrak tirth, etc. All these holy places including

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BADRIKASHRAMA

Continuing with his tale, lord Varaha told Prithvi- "There is a sacred place in the Himalayas which is very inaccessible. It is famously known as Badrikashrama and holds an important place among all the holy places. One who makes a pilgrimage to that place gets all his wishes fulfilled. There is a reservoir at the mountain top called Brahma kund. One who observes fast for three consecutive nights and takes a holy dip in that reservoir attains virtues similar to "Agnishtom yagya". One who takes his last birth in its vicinity certainly attains to my abode. There are several other holy places in the vicinity of Badrikashrama like Agnisatya pad, Indra loka, Satya loka, Chatuhsrota, Ved dhar, etc. Ved dhar is the same place where the vedas had manifested from lord Brahma's mouth.

BADRIKASHRAMA

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MANDAR TIRTH

Mandar tirth is named after a celestial tree called Mandar. This sacred place of pilgrimage is situated at the foothills of Vindhya mountain. There

is a large mandar tree over there which has some unique qualities. This tree is visible only on auspicious days of dwadashi and chaturdashi and becomes invisible on the rest of the days. Some other holy places situated in the vicinity of mandar tirth are Prapan, Modan, Baikunthkaran.

There is another holy place called mandar but it is situated on the Meru mountain. This holy place is also known as 'Syamantpanchak'. One important characteristic of this holy place is that there are huge rocks resembling a mace, a wheel, a plough and a conch.

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SOMESHWAR LINGA

Chandra deva had once performed an austere penance to get absolved from the curse of his Daksha Prajapati his father-in-law. During the

course of his penance Chandra deva made a Shivalinga and worshipped it. Finally lord Shiva appeared and agreed to dwell in that particular Shivalinga as per the request of Chandra deva. There is a reservoir situated to the south of Someshwar temple which is believed to liberate a man from all his sins. In course of time this place became famous as Someshwar linga.

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SHALGRAM KSHETRA

Prithvi requested lord Varaha to shed light on the famous penance which sage Shalankayan had performed. Lord Varaha narrated the following

tale- "Long long ago sage Shalankayan did an austere penance to please me (lord Vishnu). There was a 'sal' tree nearby and the sage was ignorant of the fact that I dwell in that sacred tree. When I appeared, he requested me to bless him with a divine son who had qualities like lord Shiva. I revealed to him that his son (Nandikeshwar) had already manifested and was presently staying at 'Vraja' (Mathura). I also revealed to him that although I was present in the 'sal' tree but he was unware of this fact because of his ignorance. In course of time, this very place became famous as 'Shalgram tirth'. A devotee who makes a pilgrimage to this holy place is liberated from all kinds of worldly bondages."

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RURU KSHETRA

Lord Varaha told Prithvi- "This holy place is named after Ruru, the daughter of Devadutt and an apsara named Pramalocha. Devadutt came

from the lineage of sage Bhrigu. Once Devadutt did an austere penance to please lord Shiva. His penance continued for ten thousand years. Indra became worried and sent a beautiful apsara named Pramalocha to disturb his penance. Unfortunately Devadutt fell into the trap laid by Indra. He was infatuated by Pramalocha's divine beauty and enjoyed an intimate life with her for a long time. Finally he realized his mistake and regretted his foolishness. He decided to abandon Pramalocha and recommence his penance. Ultimately he was successful in pleasing lord Shiva and attaining to Shiva loka." "Meanwhile Pramalocha who was pregnant, gave birth to a girl child and died. The baby girl was nurtured and brought up by a deer named Ruru after whom she got her own name. In course of time Ruru grew up and decided to please lord Vishnu by her penance. She did an austere penance for one hundred years by remaining still at a place. At last I (lord Vishnu) became pleased by her total devotion and appeared before her. She requested me to name that place on her. I blessed her and thus that place became famous as Ruru kshetra."

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GONISHKRAMAN TIRTH

Lord Shiva told Prithvi- "Gonishkraman tirth is situated in the Himalayas. Sage Aurva had his hermitage at this sacred place which was

incidentally burnt to ashes by lord Shiva. Aurva cursed Shiva as the result of which Shiva started wandering throughout the world in a restless manner."

"Once, lord Shiva visited the hermitage of sage Aurvanam accompanied by his consort-Uma. The purpose of the visit was to seek Aurvanam's help in curing his restlessness. Sage Aurvanam advised him to have a bath with the milk of Surabhi cow. I (lord Vishnu) then brought down seventy-seven Surabhi cows from the heaven and thus helped Shiva take bath with their milk. At last, Shiva's reastlessness came to an end and this holy place became famous as 'Gonishkraman' tirth."

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STOOTSWAMI TIRTH

Lord Varaha then went on to describe the greatness of Stootswami tirth and told Prithvi- "I shall incarnate as Krishna at this place in the era of

dwapar. I shall take birth in the house of Vasudeva and Devaki. There is a pond situated at about 5 kosas from Stootswami tirth. Anybody who take holy dips in its holy water for five days becomes absolved of all his sins.

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DWARKA

Lord Varaha told Prithvi- "There is a holy place called 'Panchsar' in Dwarka. Anybody who stays there for six days and takes holy dips in 'Panchasar' enjoys all the pleasures of life. Dwarka is situated at the sea-shore and the crocodiles living there never trouble people taking their bath. These crocodiles also have one unique characteristic- they never eat anything that is offered to them by a sinner but unhesitatingly accept anything from a virtuous person. There are several other holy places in and around Dwarka- Panchpind, Hanskunda, Hanstirth, Chakratirth, Raivatak, Vishnu-sankarama, etc. Vishnu sankarama is the very place where I, in my incarnation as Krishna would be killed by a hunter named Jara.

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SANANDOOR TIRTH

This holy place is situated between Malay mountain and the ocean. Nearby, there is another place called Sangaman where Sri Rama while on

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LOHARGAL TIRTH

Lord Varaha told Prithvi- "There is a region inhabited by mlecchas, situated at the distance of some 30 yojans. This region is surrounded by Himalaya mountain in its central as well as southern parts. Lohargal tirth is situated near this region and is well protected by nature which makes it very inaccessible. Once demons tried to invade this holy place but all of them were killed by me (Sri Hari). I also protected Brahma and Rudra from the wrath of the demons and named that place Lohargal. Lohargal is the most sacred place of pilgrimage and spread in the area of 25 yojans. It is a self manifested place and has immense religious significance.

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MATHURA

Describing the majesty of Mathura, lord Varaha told Prithvi- "Mathura is very dear to me because this is the very place where I shall be taking

incarnation as Krishna. Mathura is the most sacrosanct place and no other holy place can be compared to it. There are many other holy places in and around Mathura- Vishranti, Surya tirth, Koti tirth, Vayu tirth, etc. Each one of them has its own religious significance. A holy pond named 'Vatsa-krindan' lies in Mathura region. Anybody taking a holy dip in that holy pond is certain to attain to the abode of 'Vayu'. In the vicinity lies Vrindavan, the holiest place which would be witness to many of my divine plays."

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KAPILA TIRTH

Describing the origin of 'Kapila Varaha' (an idol of lord Varaha made by sage Kapila) lord Varaha told Prithvi- "Sage Kapila was a great devotee of mine. He had made my idol and worshipped it regularly. Later on, Indra acquired it and started worshipping it. The demon king Ravana took it to Lanka after defeating Indra in a battle. In Treta Yuga I (Sri Rama) defeated him and made Vibhishan, his brother the king of Lanka. This way, the idol came under the possession of Vibhishan but he agreed to part with it at my request. This was how I brought that idol to Ayodhya. After reaching Ayodhya, I presented it to Shatrughan as a reward for killing Lavanasur. Later on, while Shatrughan was going to Mathura he carried that idol along with him."

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GOVARDHAN TIRTH

Lord Varaha, continuing with the description of various holy places told Prithvi about the magnificence of Govardhan parvat- "Govardhan parvat

is situated near Mathura. It will have great religious importance because it will witness a great feat of mine in Dwapar Yuga. I shall lift this mountain to protect people from the incessant rain caused by Indra. There are numerous holy places of great religious significance in the vicinity of Govardhan mountain like Indra tirth, Yama tirth, Varuna tirth and Kubera tirth. There is also a famous fresh-water lake called 'Kadamb khand' where people perform tarpan of their ancestors."

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GOKARNA TIRTH

Lord Varaha told Prithvi about the greatness of Gokama tirth- "Long long ago there lived a vaishya named Vasukarn at Mathura. Sushila, his wife

was deeply religious but inspite of that she was issueless. One day, she had gone to take her bath in river Saraswati where she found many women taking their bath. The children of these women were playing nearby. Sushila became very sad and being unable to control her emotions started crying."

"A sage saw her crying and asked her as to what made her so sad. Sushila narrated her woeful tale to him. The sage took pity on her and advised her to worship lord Gokama. The sage said-'You will definitely be blessed with a son.' Sushila went home and narrated the whole incident to her husband. Both of them started worshipping lord Gokarna Mahadeva with total devotion. After ten years, a son was born to them. Vasukarn named that child after lord Gokarna to express his gratitude to the deity."

"In course of time, Gokarna grew up and got married but even after a long time he did not have a progeny. So his father married him to three more women, one after another, but even this did not prove to be of any help to Gokama because he remained a sonless person. This made Gokarna very sad and he engaged himself in various charitable activities thinking that the virtues thus attained might bless him in begetting a son. He got constructed many temples and ordered wells to be dug up for the benifit of the travellers. Very soon, all his money was spent and he became worried about the future of his family. So he decided to go to distant places to earn wealth." "Once while on his journey he met a divine parrot who possessed tremendous knowledge. Gokama was very much impressed by the parrot's knowledge. He asked the parrot from where had it imbibed such divine knowledge. The parrot revealed to him that he was Shukodar in its previous birth and was a learned man. He had attained the form of parrot due to the curse of sage Shukdev. But sage Shukdev had been kind enough to allow him to retain all the knowledge in his next birth. The parrot also told Gokama how it had been kept inside a cage by a fowler and requested him to help it out from the captivity."

"Gokarna requested the fowler to give the learned parrot to him. The fowler agreed but asked for all the virtues attained by Gokarna in return. Gokama happily agreed to donate all his virtues and proceeded with that parrot. Now, Gokarna had become bereft of all his virtues he had attained so far. Once while he was on a voyage in connection with his trade the ship was caught in a severe cyclone and the chances of survival looked

very bleak. All his fellow travellers had a misconception that they had been struck by the misfortune only because of Gokarna's sins. The parrot was saddened after hearing what people said about his master. It decided to help him and flew away towards north. While flying it found a Vishnu temple where many divine women and other creatures had gathered to worship. The descendants of Jatayu were also among them. The parrot narrated the woeful tale of his master to all of them. All the divine birds decided to help Gokama."

"The divine birds instructed the parrot to follow them and then flew towards the place where Gokarna's ship was stranded. Finally, they were successful in rescuing Gokama and bringing him back to the same temple. Gokarna worshipped lord Keshav and performed the rituals of tarpan in the name of his ancestors. In the meantime, all the divine women also arrived there to worship. They were pleased to meet Gokarna and gave him divine food to eat. They also allowed him to stay there for as long as he wished."

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"Meanwhile the ship managed to reach the sea shore. Gokarna's companions met his parents and narrated the whole incident to him. Gokarna's parents were filled with sorrow at the fate of their son. On the other hand, Gokama continued to live in that temple for a long period. He

was worried about his father as it had been a long time since he saw him. He sent the parrot to bring his news. The parrot flew away to Mathura and met his father-Vasukarn. Vasukam thanked the parrot for saving his son's life. The parrot then flew back on his return journey and gave the good news to Gokama."

"One day Gokama found the divine ladies extremely sad. When asked, they told him that the king of Ayodhya had destroyed the beautiful gardens of Mathura and this was the reason for their sadness. Gokama assured them that he would convince the king to abandon his evil plan if he got a chance to meet him. The divine women then provided Gokarna with a divine aircraft boarded on which he reached Mathura. Gokama met the king and managed to convince him against destroying beautiful gardens. The king was extrtemely impressed by his knowledge and presented great amount of wealth to him. This way all the divine women became happy once again."

"Gokarna then went home and met his family members. His parents and his wives were very pleased to see him. Gokama then got constructed a Shukdev temple to honor his saviour- the learned parrot. It was only because of that parrot that he could acquire such wisdom and knowledge. To express his gratitude to the fowler he donated all the virtues he had acquired by taking bath in the holy confluence (triveni) because had it not been for the fowler he would never have got the knowledgeable parrot. Gokarna lived happily for a long time."

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INSTALLATION OF IDOLS

IDOL MADE OF WOOD

Prithvi requested lord Varaha to describe the proper methods of installing various types of idols. Lord Varaha replied that a devotee desirous of making a wooden idol must select the wood of 'Bassia latifolia' for his purpose. The wood should be purified and then given shape as per the appearance of the deity. The idol is then installed in a temple amidst the performance of appropriate rituals. During installation ceremony various articles like camphor, Vermillion, sandalwood, incense, etc. are offered to the deity. The swastika mark is a sign of auspiciousness so the devotee must keep this in mind while giving shape to the idol.

This swastika mark must be carved out on the idol. Similarly, other signs of lord Vishnu like 'srivatsa' and 'kaushtubh' should also be carved out on the idol. Lord Vishnu is then invoked and requested to dwell within that idol by chanting mantras. After the deity has been invoked, the 'wood' no longer remains a lifeless structure but it becomes the embodiment of the deity. The idol is then considered to be fit for worship. While worshipping, a devotee should offer a bhoga of kheer to the deity. Burning a ghee or sesame-oil lamp in front of the deity is considered good. The devotee should then circumambulate around the temple premise. While circumambulating, he should keep on chanting the sacred mantra 'om namo narayanay'. The idol thus installed should be worshipped daily without failure."

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STONE- IDOL

"A proficient sculptor should be chosen to carve out the deity's shape from a pure and spotless stone. First of all the sculptor should clearly

draw the outline of deity's appearance on the stone with a marker and then carefully carve it out from the stone. The idol is then purified by sprinkling 'akshat' on the deity's idol. While worshipping a devotee should burn a ghee lamp and invoke lord Vishnu to dwell in that idol by chanting the sacred mantra- om namo narayanay. The installation of idol being complete, he should observe a fast for the whole night. Next morning, after finishing his daily chores he should put on white clothes and change his old 'yagyopavit' with a new one. The idol thus made is considered fit to be worshipped. Purva-bhadrapad is considered to be the best time for the installation of a stone-idol. During the course of installation ceremony, a devotee should live either on milk or cereal like barley. The rituals of worship consist of numerous activities like lighting four lamps in front of the deity, keeping four small pots each filled up with articles like 'panchagavya', water, sandalwood and milk. The rituals of worship are considered to be incomplete without the chantings of vedic mantras."

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EARTHEN AND COPPER IDOLS

"A devotee should carefully make a beautiful earthen idol without any sign of crack. The most auspicious time for the installation of an earthen

idol is said to be during 'Shravana nakshatra'. An invocation is made to the deity to dwell within the idol after which ablution of the idol is performed with the help of various articles like holy water, panchagavya, sandalwood, etc. The rituals of worship are similar to that of woodden or stone-idol." "The best time for the installation of copper idol is said to be during 'chitra' nakshatra. The idol should be installed facing north and should be purified with the help of holy water, panchagavya, etc. Then the deity is invoked to dwell within the idol. The invocation is made by chanting sacred mantras. Now the idol is fit to be worshipped. The rituals are same as mentioned earlier."

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BRONZE IDOL

"The most auspicious time for the installation of bronze-idol is said to be during jyeshtha nakshatra. The idol should be installed facing north. At

the time of installation the devotee must not forget to keep four small pots in front of the deity, each filled with articles like 'panchgavya' water, sandalwood and honey. The rituals of invocation as well as worship are same as mentioned earlier."

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SILVER AND GOLD IDOLS

"The rituals for the installation of silver or gold idols are similar to that of copper or bronze idol. Prithvi requested lord Varaha to reveal the name of deities whom a devotee can worship at home. Lord Vishnu replied- "A devotee can worship any deity at home but worship of two Shivalingas is prohibited. Similarly a devotee should never worship three Shaligrams or three Durga idols or two Surya idols. A devotee should also never worship Shaligrams adding up to odd numbers- 3, 5, 7, etc. But there is no harm in worshipping one Shaligram. A devotee must never worship broken or cracked idol because it does not bode well for the worshipper. A 'chakra' mark on the Shaligram is considered as very auspicious and it can be worshipped even if the idol is broken or cracked. The virtues attained by worshipping twelve Shaligrams are similar to that of worshipping twelve crore Shivalingas. Partaking of 'charnamrif that has been offered to Shaligram absolves a man from all his sins. Anybody who either buys or sells a Shaligram is certain to go to hell."

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RITUALS PERTAINING TO LAST RITES

PITRA YAGYA

Prithvi requested lord Varaha to define the meaning of 'Pitra' yagya (rituals pertaining to last rite) and its significance. Lord Varaha replied- "Sage Nimi was the first person to perform the the rituals of pitra-yagya after the death of his son Atreya. Sage Atreya is famous for his penance which he did for ten thousand years. When Atreya died, his father-Nimi was filled with grief. Nimi tried his best to overcome his sorrow but to no avail. He mourned his son's death for three consecutive nights. He thought that perhaps the performance of 'shradha' rituals would be the best means to get rid of his sorrow. So he decided to perform the 'shradha' rituals on the twelfth day of 'magh'. On that day, he invited many brahmins and fed them with the same delicacies which Atreya would have liked to eat. He performed all the rituals well within a day which would otherwise have taken a week to perform. He also performed the rituals of 'pinda dan' by donating cereals, vegetables and fruits. While performing the rituals of pinda-dan, he took some kusha grass in his hands and after pointing it towards south chanted Atreya's name and gotra. In the night, Nimi sat on the seat of deer-skin underneath which kusha grass had been spread. He then tried to concentrate on the tip of the nose. But in spite of all his efforts there was no sign of mental peace he was so desperately seeking and thought of his dead son continued to torment him."

"Nimi was troubled by a guilt that perhaps he had set a bad precedent by performing the rituals of pinda dan because nobody in the past had ever performed the rituals. He was worried as to what would the coming generation think of him. He was so much troubled by the thought that he could not sleep for the whole night. Next morning he got up, still worried. He remained in a disturbed state of mind for many days. At last, when it became too much for him to handle, he decided to end his life. In the meantime, sage Narada arrived there and assured him that there was nothing to be worried about as whatever he had done was most appropriate. Narada also convinced him that even his (Nimi's) dead father would vouch for this fact."

"Nimi remembered his father who had died long ago. His father revealed to him that the rituals which he had performed were in fact the rituals of 'pitra-yagya'. Describing the importance of pitra-yagya Nemi's father told him- 'The name pitra-yagya' was given by none other than lord Brahma himself who was the first one to perform the rituals. Later on, lord

Brahma had described the rituals to Narada and this is why Narada was convinced that you had committed no wrong. Nemi's father then described as to what should be done with regard to the person who lay dying- 'When the death approaches a person looses his consciousness and becomes extremely fearful. At that time, a brahmin should constantly study the scriptures so that he could die in peace. Donating a cow helps to pacify the soul of a dead person. If sacred mantras are whishpered in the ears of a dying person he dies peacefully. When the death seems imminent, a morsel of 'Madhupark' (mixture of curd, water, honey and clarified butter) should be kept in the mouth of the dying person. While doing this one should pray to the almighty to liberate the dead man's soul.' 'The dead body should then be carried and kept under a tree where it is purified by smearing ghee, oil, perfumes, etc. It is then carried to cremation ground and kept at the bank of a river-feet pointing towards south. After this, the dead body should be bathed by remembering all the sacred places of pilgrimage. It should then be kept on the pyre-feet pointing south. The pyre should be lit and the following prayer should be said-o Agnideva! I pray to you to burn all the sins committed by this person so that he attains to heaven. Now, circumambulation around the pyre is made and the pyre is lit towards the head side.'

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'After consigning the dead body to flames, the rituals of 'tarpan' and 'pinda-dan' are performed. All the people assembled there should purify themselves before returning home. The period starting from the time the dead body is consigned to flames till the next ten days is called

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ASHAUCHA AND PINDA KALPA

'Ashaucha' means impurity, so it is the period during which the son of the deceased is considered to be impure. The period begins from the day on which the death has occurred and continues for the following ten days. Varaha 'Pinda-dan' means offering certain kind of food to the deceased in the belief that it would satiate his soul.

Lord Varaha, while describing about the rituals which are supposed to be performed during the period of ashaucha and also the rituals of making pinda dan, told Prithvi- "The observer of shradha rituals should take his bath in a river on the third day from the day on which death has occured. After taking his bath, he should offer three 'pindas' (consisting of cereal flour) as well as three palmful of water into the river in the name of the deceased. On the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh days, he should make offerings of one pinda and one palmful of water in the name of the deceased. He should never make offerings of the Pindas at the same place on the contrary he should select diferent spots for this purpose."

"On the tenth day he should get his hair tonsured and change his clothes. His relatives (same-gotra) should take their bath after applying an ointment prepared from sesame seeds, amla and oil on their bodies. 'Ekodishta Shradha' is performed on the eleventh day. For this ritual to be performed, the concerned person should first purify himself and then offer Pinda to the deceased person as well as other manes. The rituals of Ekodishta Shradha are same for all the four castes. The brahmins should be invited and fed on the thirteenth day. While feeding the brahmins a religious vow (Sankalpa) is taken in the name of the deceased person."

"For the purpose of offering 'pinda', an 'altar' should be made at river-bank or any other suitable place. The rituals can be performed either facing south or east. Offering 64 (Pindas) is considered to be ideal. Pinda dan can also be made under a peepal tree but the place should be well protected from the reach of animals like dogs, cock, pigs, etc. It is believed that if these animals visit the place where 'Pinda dan' is being made then it becomes difficult for the soul to attain liberation. The rituals of Pinda dan should be performed at a pure place otherwise there is a fear of soul going to hell. The name and the gotra of the deceased person should be pronounced while performing the rituals. After the rituals are complete all the assembled persons may sit down to have their meal."

Donating things like an umbrella, clothes, cereals, ornaments to the brahmins are believed to be auspicious.

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THE FLAWED SHRADHA AND ITS PREVENTION

Prithvi requested Lord Varaha to describe about the mistakes committed during shradha rituals and how they could be prevented—

Lord Varaha replied—It is a grave sin to partake of a meal meant for the soul of the deceased person. Anybody who has committed this sin should atone for his sin by observing a fast for full day and a night. He also has to perform many other rituals like taking bath in a river flowing eastward, performing tarpan, making offerings of sesame seeds into the fire, Shanti path, Mangal path etc. Partaking of 'Pancha-gavya' (a mixture of cow's milk, cow's urine, cow-dung, curd and charified butter) or 'Madhupark' is also believed to purify such a person."

"Similarly, showing disrespect to the invited brahmins is also considered to be a grave sin. Donating articles to unworthy brahmins is also considered to be an inappropriate act. The performer of Shradha should refrain from all these acts."

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PREPARATION OF 'MADHUPARK'

While describing the method of preparing Madhupark, Lord Varaha told Prithvi—"Madhupark" manifested from the right half of my body at the

time when the process of creation began. This is the reason why it is so pure. Anybody who makes offering of Madhupark in the course of my worship, attains to my abode. For the preparation of Madhupark honey, curd and ghee are mixed in equal proportion. While preparing it sacred mantras in my praise should be constantly chanted. Giving some Madhupark to a dying man liberates his soul."

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DESCRIPTION OF HELL

NACHIKETA'S EXPERIENCE

Once, Janmejay asked Sage Vaishampayan about Yamrajpuri and its location. He also wanted to know as to what should a man do so that he does not have to go there.

Sage Vaishampayan narrated the tale of Nachiketa, one of the few blessed persons to have visited Yamarajpuri with his mortal body— "Long Long ago, there lived a Sage named Uddyalak. He had a son named Nachiketa. One day, while Uddyalak was performing a'Yagya', Nachiketa arrived there and disturbed him by repeatedly asking- 'To whom will you give me?' Sage Uddyalak, in a fit of rage cursed Nachiketa to go to hell. But after he cooled down, he regretted for having cursed his dear son. Nachiketa being an obedient son was ready to go to hell. His father tried his best to convince him against doing this but to no avail. Nachiketa assured his father that he would return safely after visiting Yampuri."

"Thus, Nachiketa went to Yampuri and met Yamaraj—the lord of death. He stayed there for some days and witnessed all the events taking place over there. Ultimately he sought Yamaraj's permission to return. When he returned home, his father was extremely delighted to find his son alive. Very soon, the place was thronged by many people and everybody was curious to know about his experiences during his stay in the hell. Nachiketa replied— Sinners like liars, greedy people, jealous people, caluminators, treacherers etc, go to hell. Similarly, one who kills a child or a woman, or kills a brahmin, or one who criticizes the Vedas, or lends money on interest, or one who abandons his parents or faithful wife, or one who ciritizes his guru, or one who sells liquor, or a brahmin who sells Vedas, goes to hell and tastes the fruits of his sinul actions."

"Yamapuri is made of gold and spread in the area of one thousand yojan. It is well fortified and it is impossible for anybody to tresspass its territory. I saw sinners experiencing unbearable torture over there. I also saw couple of rivers flowing there—Pushpodaka, at the bank of which there are trees in abundance and Vaivaswati, which flows through the central part of Yamapuri. Vaivaswati contains divine water which never dries up. Yamapuri has two entrances—one through which only virtuous souls like sages and hermits are allowed to enter and the second through which sinners enter Yamapuri. The former entrance is such that even heat loses its quality in its vicinity. The latter entrance is situated in the south and has a large iron gate. I also saw three large ditches called

'Audoombar', 'Avirchiman' and 'Uchchavach' which are meant for the sinners. Sinners are also forced to pass through the flames that continuously keep on errupting to the west of Yamapuri.

"I saw a grand assembly hall where truthful and virtuous people live. It is graced by the presence of sages like Manu, Vyasa, Atri, Gautam, Angira, Bhrigu and others. There, I saw a goddess who is worshipped by Yamaraj. The goddess controls all the functions of the world. I also saw the ferocious Kala. He possesses extreme anger and is very powerful. Time does not have any influence on him as the result of which he enjoys eternal youth. I also saw various types of demons and giants in the hell."

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I saw many messengers of Yamaraj punishing the sinners. Some were beating the sinners with sticks in their hands while some sinners were being forced to enter fire. I saw all the sinner wailing and repenting for their sinful deeds. Many sinners were kept at a very dark place where

there was no light. Those who had committed graver sins were put in boiling oil. I saw many sinners being given all sorts of severe punishment. I saw a place where iron nails were spread all around. This was the place where people who breached the modesty of women were given punishment."

"I saw ten different hells—Tapta, Mahatapt, Raurav, etc. Each of the latter is more ferocious than the former. The sinners are sent to all these hells on the basis of the gravity of their sins. Yamaraj himself instructs chitragupta on the punishment to be given to these sinners."

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KARMA VIPAK

Karma Vipak means the fruits one reaps according to his or her Karma. While continuing with the description of various aspects of hell,

Nachiketa told the assembled sages-At Yamapuri, Chitragupta goes through the record of all the deeds, committed by a man when he was alive and brings into the notice of Yamaraj.

Yamaraj then decides upon the punishment to be given to the concerned soul. The punishment can be varied like if the soul was virtuous then it would be sent to heaven, or the soul may even be made to take birth as a tree, or an animal or any other creature. Sinners like those who had remained disinclined towards any kind of virtuous deed, or those who had abandoned their faithful wives, were sent to the hell named Raurav. The souls of virtuous people were sent to the heaven. Those who had extreme attachment to women took rebirth as human beings. People who had attained martyrdom while fighting a battle were sent to Indrapuri. Those who had engaged themselves in virtuous deeds throughout their lives were rewarded for their good deeds."

KARMA VIPAK

Karma Vipak means the fruits one reaps according to his or her Karma. While continuing with the description of various aspects of hell, Nachiketa told the assembled sages--At Yamapuri, Chitragupta goes through the record of all the deeds, committed by a man when he was alive and brings into the notice of Yamaraj.

Yamaraj then decides upon the punishment to be given to the concerned soul. The punishment can be varied like if the soul was virtuous then it would be sent to heaven, or the soul may even be made to take birth as a tree, or an animal or any other creature. Sinners like those who had remained disinclined towards any kind of virtuous deed, or those who had abandoned their faithful wives, were sent to the hell named Raurav. The souls of virtuous people were sent to the heaven. Those who had extreme attachment to women took rebirth as human beings. People who had attained martyrdom while fighting a battle were sent to Indrapuri. Those who had engaged themselves in virtuous deeds throughout their lives were rewarded for their good deeds."

VIRTUES OF CHASTITY

First of all, the area is purified by coating it with cow-dung after which a black deer-skin is spread on it alongwith 'kusha grass'. Two pots- one

large and the other a small one are placed side by side. These pots are filled with sugarcane juice and symbolize 'Rasa-Dhenu' and the calf. Four sugarcanes symbolizing the four legs of 'Rasa-Dhenu' are fixed at four comers. After that, one small silver piece is placed at the base of each of the sugarcanes symbolizing hoofs. Rasa-Dhenu is then adorned with colourful cloths and flowers. Again, four small pots filled with sesame seeds are kept at the four comers near Rasa-Dhenu. After the worship is accomplished, Rasa-Dhenu is donated to a brahmin. A person who donates Rasa-Dhenu is liberated from all his sins and all his ancestors as well as the generations to come attain to the Heaven.

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LIBERATION FROM SINS

Narada asked Yamaraj about the reason why joy was so elusive to human beings. He also wanted to know about the reasons for man's sorrows.

Yamaraj replied—-Man's destiny is defined by his own actions. He has to taste the fruits of his actions. He has to taste the fruits of his each and every actions. So when a man finds himself amidst sorrows he must realize that he is reaping the fruits of his past actions. If a man commits virtuous deeds then joy is experienced but sinful deeds invite sorrows and miseries. Desires force a man to take countless birth. A man takes birth on the basis of his past karmas. God does not interfere in this matter. So, only foolish people curse God for their miseries. They forget that their sorrows are of their own making. A man can liberate himself from sins by engaging in virtuous deeds and abstaining from sinful deeds. A man should perform his duties with a sense of detachment, because attachment results into the transmigration of the soul.

Lord Brahma has declared that 'Shishumar chakra' is the symbolic expression of his own self. Anybody desirous of getting liberated from his sins must make an image of this chakra and worship it. One who visualises this chakra within his body, too, becomes liberated from his sins. Mental worship of various planets (Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Saturn, Mars etc.) visualized at the various points of this chakra helps a man to become liberated from all the sins. Similarly, practising Pranayama for hundred times helps a man to become liberated from all the sins. The most easiest way to become liberated from sins is by engaging oneself in the servitude of a cow. This deed is as virtuous as making pilgrimages to all the sacred places together. Observing fast on Ekadashi also helps a man to become liberated from his sins." Having finished his narrations, Nachiketa, looked at the sages, who were listening with rapt attention. The sages thanked Nachiketa for enlightening them on the sacred place called Yamapuri.

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MISCELLANEOUS STORIES

GOKARNESHWAR

The famous battle of 'Tarakamaya' had ended. The deities after having defeated the demons had once again regained the control of heaven. Lord Brahma being satisfied with the postive outcome of the war was engrossed in his meditation when Sanatkumar arrived and asked—"O Lord! I am anxious to know about the origin of three famous Shivalingas —Uttar-Gokam, Dakshain-Gokarn and Sringeshwar. What made Lord Shiva to take the form of a deer (Gokarn)? Please enlighten me on all these subjects."

Lord Brahma replied—The northern peak of Mandarachal mountain is famously known as Munjawan. This place is divinely beautiful and the stones and rocks over there glitter like diamonds. It has many rivers, lakes and springs. The atmosphere overthere is so serene that even the deities are tempted to have their abodes at that place. This sacred place is graced by the presence of 'Sthanu Maheshwar'.

Nandi— the lord of all the Ganas of Shiva, was a virtuous brahmin in Treta Yuga. Once, he did an austere penance to realize lord Shiva. The penance lasted for one thousand years. At last Lord Shiva became pleased and appeared before him. Lord Shiva blessed Nandi with an appearance similar to him (Shiva).

Lord Shiva said— From today onwards you will be blessed with three eyes just like me. You will be worshipped by the deities and demons alike. You will be immortal and time and age will have no effect upon you. You are being granted with the lordship of all my Ganas. It will be your duty to stand guard at the entrance of my dwelling place.

Lord Shiva then informed Nandi that in a short time the deities would be visiting him (Nandi). Due to some reason Lord Shiva had pledged not to give deities an opportunity to see his physical form. So, after blessing Nandi, Shiva disappeared and went to live in Sleshmatak forest in the form of a deer. Nandi was unaware of this fact.

Meanwhile, after being blessed by Shiva, Nandi had attained a divinely radiant form. When the deities saw Nandi possessing three eyes instead of two, they immediately understood that this could not have happened without the blessing of Lord Shiva.

All the deities arrived at Munjawan peak and requested Nandi to reveal Shiva's whereabouts. Nandi expressed his helplessness and told them that he was not aware where Shiva went after blessing him. He requested the deities to find out Shiva on their own. The deities searched for Shiva in all the three worlds but could not find him. I (Lord Brahma) was also present in the search-team of the deities. I sat down to meditate. In the deep state of meditation, I came to know that Shiva was living in the form of a deer in sleshmatak forest. I revealed this fact to the deities. All the deities then went into the sleshmatak forest and recognised Shiva living in the form of a deer. The deer (Shiva) had one hom on its head. All the deities ran towards the deer with the desire of catching hold of it. Indra held the topmost part of the hom with a firm grip while I (Lord Brahma) held its middle portion. Similarly, Lord Vishnu held the lower part. Very soon, the hom got uprooted because of the force which was being applied on it. Lord Shiva vanished out of our sight.

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We were left behind with three pieces of horn in our hands. We cursed ourselves for our bad luck. Suddenly, we heard Shiva's voice instructing us to install those pieces of horns at that very place and worship them. The upper part of the horn became famous as Uttar Gokarn, while its

middle portion became famous as Dakshain Gokarn. The part of the hom, which Vishnu installed became famous as 'Sringeshwar'. All these three places have incomparable religious significance and are situated in Nepal. Sleshmatak forest is situated at the distance of 2 miles from the famous Pashupatinath temple." Sanatkumar thanked Lord Brahma for enlightening him on these secret topics.

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THE MEANS OF VISHNU REALIZATION

Once, Sage Agastya narrated the following tale to King Bhadrashva— One day, Narada went to Lord Vishnu and asked about the means by which a

devotee could realize him. Lord Vishnu replied—Those who worship me by chanting the mantras of either 'Purushasukta' or 'Vaidik Samhita' can certainly realize me. Those who perform oblation according to the rituals of 'Pancharatra' can also have my divine glimpse. But, the rituals of Pancharatra yagya can be performed only by the brahmins. All the rest of the castes can realize me by devotion, chanting my name and making pilgrimage to holy places. "Sage Agastya while giving discourse to king Bhadrashwa also predicted that sinners would outnumber the virtuous ones in Kali Yuga and said—"People would abandon their respective 'dharmas' and the caste system would become extinct."

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LORD VISHNU-THE ALMIGHTY GOD

Once, Sage Agastya had organised a grand yagya in which he had invited all the deities and sages. Lord Vishnu, Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva also

went there. Agastya was puzzled as to who was the most superior among all three of them. He asked Lord Shiva in this regard. Lord Shiva replied —One who is worshipped by performing oblation- One who is the source of this universe and into whom it ultimately merges; is none other than Lord Janardhan. So he should be worshipped first of all.

He is the only one who expresses himself in three forms—Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh. Rajas guna is predominant in lord Brahma along with some quantities of Satva guna and Tamoguna.Lord Brahma has manifested from the naval of Lord Vishnu. Tamas guna is the dominant quality in me (Rudra) with little bit of satva and rajo gunas. Narayan is the embodiment of pure satva guna. In Satya Yuga, He is worshipped by the means of meditation. During Treta Yuga, He is worshipped by the means of oblation. During Dwapar Yuga, He is pleased by nothing but the rituals of Pancharatra. During Kali Yuga, people will worship Him by various means. Lord Shiva's revelations had completely satisfied Sage Agastya.

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SAGE GAUTAM CURSES THE BRAHMINS

There were many sages present at the yagya organised by Agastya. Some of them asked Lord Shiva as to why he had created some scriptures which

appeared so confusing to human beings. Lord Shiva revealed to them that he had done so to protect the brahmins from the curse of Sage Gautam. Then he narrated the incident as it had happened —

During ancient times, Sage Gautam did an austere penance in Dandakaranya forest. Lord Brahma became pleased and gave him some divine seeds capable of producing eternal crops. Gautam then went to SaptaSring mountain and made his hermitage there. He sowed the seeds and became pleasantly surprised when he saw rice grains sprouting up withiin few moments. He lived there happily with his disciples. In course of time, the whole country was struck by famine except the place where Gautam had his hermitage.

One day, few sages arrived at Gautam's hermitage. Gautam treated them with all the respect. These sages enjoyed the hospitality of Gautam and stayed at his hermitage till the famine phase was over. Then they decided to go back to their respective native places. When they sought Gautam's permission, he requested him to stay for few more days. The sages then decided to use deceitful means for taking Gautam's permission. They created a superficial cow with the help of their illussionary powers and left it near the hermitage of Gautam.

Gautam was very pleased to see that cow. He eulogised it by sprinkling water on it. Hardly had he finished his act than the cow died. All those wicked sages arrived there and cursed Gautam for killing an innocent cow. They told him that they could never live along with a person who had killed a cow. Gautam then requested those impostors to tell about the means by which he could become absolved from the heinous sin he had committed. The sages told him that the cow would become alive once Ganga water was sprinkled on its body.

Gautam once again did a tremendous penance to please Lord Shiva. When lord Shiva appeared, he requested him to give a lock of his hair. Lord Shiva agreed to give a lock of his hair to Gautam. Gautam then went to the spot where the cow's body was lying. He sprinkled some water emanating from the hair. The illussionary cow disappeared within a moment and in its place was created a river. Right then, the sapta rishis arrived there and blessed Gautam. Meanwhile, Gautam realized that a wicked prank had been played on him by those wicked sages. He cursed

those wicked sages that they would become bereft of the knowledge of Vedas and also that they would no longer be entitled to perform the vedic rituals.

The Sapta rishis requested Gautam to have mercy on those unfortunate brahmins. Gautam then declared that his curse will come true only in Kali Yuga and those brahmins will not be affected by his curse in all the remaining three yugas. The Sapta rishis came to me and informed me about whatever had happened to those unfortunate brahmins. I created 'Shiva Sanhita' from my breath which is similar to Vedas as far as the importance of rituals are concerned. I did this for the benediction of the brahmins. I know that brahmins would fall from grace during Kali Yuga. People would give little respect to the Vedas and create their own scriptures. Confusion would be prevalent and people would discover false religions.

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PRAKRITI AND PURUSHA

Once, Lord Shiva while describing about the incident when he had a divine glimpse of Lord Narayan, told Sage Agastya —

'Purusha' is none other than Lord Narayan himself and Prakriti is the medium through which he manifests his powers. I have been fortunate to have a divine glimpse of this Purusha. Lord Brahma after having created me, instructed me to create. But, I did not know how to create. So, I decided to do penance and went into the ocean. In the ocean, I saw an entity who was no more than the size of a thumb. He was Purusha himself and I immediately recognized him. I started meditating on the form of that almighty—Purusha. Suddenly, eleven more entities emerged before me. They were all very radiant and the water had become hot on account of the heat emanating from their bodies. I asked them as to who they were but they did not give any reply and went out of my sight. The next moment, I saw an extremely handsome man. I asked him about his identity and also about the eleven entities whom I had seen few moments ago. Those entities were the eleven Adityas and had gone to help Lord Brahma in the process of creation. Then he said—I am Narayana—the omnipresent lord. I am blessing you with 'divine vision' so that you can see my divine appearance.'

When I fixed my glance at Narayan I was amazed to see the same thumb-sized Narayana standing before me. But, now He was no longer having the size of a thumb. On the contrary he had expanded his body to such an extent that He appeared like a giant. I also saw Lord Brahma sitting on a lotus flower emanating from his navel. I eulogized Him with complete devotion. He blessed me and said—'You are eternal and nothing is beyond your knowledge. You will be worshipped by the deities. I shall take twelve incarnations in the coming eras and shall worship you in each of my incarnation.'

Having said this, Lord Narayana disappeared. This was how I saw the divine form of the 'Purusha'—Lord Narayan.

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BHUWAN-KOSH AND THE ISLANDS

All the sages listened with rapt attention to the description Lord Shiva made of the Almighty Narayan. But, they had few more queries in store,

so they asked Lord Shiva— "O Lord of Uma! Please tell us about the expanse of the Earth- the situation of mountains and the prominent islands."

Lord Shiva replied— "Bhuloka is situated on the surface of the Earth, while the earth itself is based on Almighty's chest. With the desire of creating the three basic gunas—Sat, raj and Tama, the Almighty Narayan created water first of all and went into 'yoganidra'. Then a lotus flower manifested from His navel on which was seated Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma then created his manasputras—Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanatkumar all of whom were enlightened souls. Then Lord Brahma created sages like Daksha etc. Daksha's daughter Shatarupa was married to Manu from whom she had two sons—Priyavrata and Uttanpad. Priyavrat had ten sons— Aghnighna, Agnibahu, Medh, Medhatithi, Dhruva, Jyotishman, Dyutiman, Havya, Vayushman and Savan. He had divided the earth into seven islands and presented them to each of his seven sons. Aghnighna became the king of Jambudweepa whereas Medhatithi, Jyotishman, Dyutiman, Havya, Vayushman and Savan became the rulers of Shakadweepa, Kraunch dweepa, Shalmali dweepa, Gomed dweepa, Plaksh dweepa, and Pushkar dweepa."

"Savan had two sons—Dhat and Mahaveeti, who were the rulers of 'Dhatki' and 'Kaumud provinces respectively. Similarly Dyutiman had three sons—Kush, Vaidyut and Jeemutvahan. Jyotishman had seven sons —Kushal, Manugavya, Peevar, Andhra, Andhakarak, Muni and Dundubhi. Kush had seven sons—Udbhid, Venuman, Rathapal, Manu, Dhriti, Prabhakar and Papil."

"Medhatithi too had seven sons—Nabhi, Shantmaya, Shishir, Mukhodam, Nandshiva, Kshemak and Dhruva. Nabhi's wife was Merudevi, who had given birth to Rishabh. Rishabh was the father of Bharata upon whom the area lying south of Himalaya mountain is named."

"Sumati was the son of Bharata. Bharata, after appointing Sumati as his successor went into the forest to do penance. The names of some prominent kings coming from the lineage of Sumati were Tej, Satsut, Indradyumna, Parmeshthi, Pratiharta, Nikhat, Unmeta, Abhav-Udgata, Prastota, Vibhu, Prithu, Anant, Gaya, Naya, Virat, Mahavirya and Sudhiman."

"Sudhiman had one hundred sons. This way the population continued to grow. The four yugas-Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga occur in a cyclic order. Each of the latter follows the former. A manvantar comprises of 71 Chaturyugas."

BHUWAN-KOSH AND THE ISLANDS

All the sages listened with rapt attention to the description Lord Shiva made of the Almighty Narayan. But, they had few more queries in store, so they asked Lord Shiva-- "O Lord of Uma! Please tell us about the expanse of the Earth- the situation of mountains and the prominent islands."

Lord Shiva replied--"Bhuloka is situated on the surface of the Earth, while the earth itself is based on Almighty's chest. With the desire of creating the three basic gunas---Sat, raj and Tama, the Almighty Narayan created water first of all and went into 'yoganidra'. Then a lotus flower manifested from His navel on which was seated Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma then created his manasputras--Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanatkumar all of whom were enlightened souls. Then Lord Brahma created sages like Daksha etc. Daksha's daughter Shatarupa was married to Manu from whom she had two sons--Priyavrata and Uttanpad. Priyavrat had ten sons--Aghnighna, Agnibahu, Medh, Medhatithi, Dhruva, Jyotishman, Dyutiman, Havya, Vayushman and Savan. He had divided the earth into seven islands and presented them to each of his seven sons. Aghnighna became the king of Jambudweepa whereas Medhatithi, Jyotishman, Dyutiman, Havya, Vayushman and Savan became the rulers of Shakadweepa, Kraunch dweepa, Shalmali dweepa, Gomed dweepa, Plaksh dweepa, and Pushkar dweepa."

"Savan had two sons--Dhat and Mahaveeti, who were the rulers of 'Dhatki' and 'Kaumud provinces respectively. Similarly Dyutiman had three sons--Kush, Vaidyut and Jeemutvahan. Jyotishman had seven sons--Kushal, Manugavya, Peevar, Andhra, Andhakarak, Muni and Dundubhi. Kush had seven sons--Udbhid, Venuman, Rathapal, Manu, Dhriti, Prabhakar and Papil."

"Medhatithi too had seven sons--Nabhi, Shantmaya, Shishir, Mukhodam, Nandshiva, Kshemak and Dhruva. Nabhi's wife was Merudevi, who had given birth to Rishabh. Rishabh was the father of Bharata upon whom the area lying south of Himalaya mountain is named."

"Sumati was the son of Bharata. Bharata, after appointing Sumati as his successor went into the forest to do penance. The names of some prominent kings coming from the lineage of Sumati were Tej, Satsut, Indradyumna, Parmeshthi, Pratiharta, Nikhat, Unmeta, Abhav-Udgata, Prastota, Vibhu, Prithu, Anant, Gaya, Naya, Virat, Mahavirya and Sudhiman."

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JAMBUDWEEPA

Dwelling upon the prominent islands, Lord Shiva told the assembled sages—"Jambudweepa is spread in the area of one lakh yojan and it consists of numerous Janapadads. It is inhabited by 'siddhas' and 'charanas' and is blessed with incomparable natural beauty."

'A total number of nine 'Varshas' lie within the territory of Jambudweepa which itself is surrounded by various oceans on all sides. Towards its east and west lie salt water oceans. Some prominent mountains of Jambudweepa are the Himalaya, the Sumeru, the Hemakut and the Nishadh. Territory situated towards east of Sumeru mountain is inhabited by the fair complexioned brahmins. Towards its south live Vaishyas. Shudras live towards the south of Sumeru and the area lying towards its north is inhabited by Kshatriyas."

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SHAK DWEEPA

Its area is approximately twice as compared to Jambudweepa. It is inhabited by virtuous people who are prosperous and who enjoy a long

life. They are free from the tortures of old age. This island is covered by oceans on its two sides—Salt water ocean on one side and 'Ksheer Sagar' (Ocean of Milk) on the other. The mountain ranges lying in the northern part of this island is known as Udayachal while 'Chandragiri is situated in the western part. There are some other mountain ranges like Rajatgiri, Ambikey, etc situated on this island. Altogether these mountain ranges total seven in number and are known as 'Kula-Parvatas'. Some primonent rivers flowing through this island are Sukumari, Kumari, Nanda, Venika, Dhenu, Ikshumati and Gabhasti. There is a large tree named Shak in the central part of this island. This is how this island derived its name.

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This island is twice the area of Shak dweepa. There are seven prominent mountain ranges in this island which are known as 'Kula Parvatas'—

Kumud, Unnat, Drona, Kank, Isha, Mahish and Mandar. There are seven prominent rivers flowing through the various parts of this island—Pratoya, Shiva, Chitra, Chandra, Vidyullta, Varna and Mahati. This island has got its name from Kusha grass which are found in abundance in its central part.

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It is twice the area of Kusha dweepa. It has seven prominent mountain ranges—Kraunch, Pavan, Devavrit, Devishtha, Devanand, Govind and

Pundareek. There are also six prominent rivers flowing in this island—Gauri, Kumudwati, Ratri, Manojava, Khyati and Pundarika. Kraunch dweepa is surrounded by an ocean of charified butter (ghee) on all its sides.

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"It is double the area of Kraunch dweepa and covers the 'clarified-butter' ocean from all sides. There are seven prominent mountains as well as seven rivers in this island." This way Lord Shiva disappeared after having finished the narration of all the prominent islands.

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TRISHAKTI

Describing the reason behind the manifestation of 'Trishakti' (Three goddesses manifesting from the bodies of Brahma Vishnu and Shiva),

Lord Varaha A told Prithvi— There lived a mighty demon named 'Andhak' who used to torment the deities. After being driven out of the heaven all the deities sought lord Brahma's help. Lord Brahma took them to Lord Shiva and requested him to find some solution to the miseries of the deities. Lord Brahma then meditated on the form of Vishnu who appeared instantly.

The powers emanating from the eyes of all the three deities got combined and resulted into the manifestation of goddess Parmeshwari. On the request of the deities, goddess Parmeshwari created three more goddesses from her body- Brahmi, Vishnupriya and Rudrani. Goddess Brahmi was of fair complexion while Vishnupriya's complexion was wheatish. Goddess Rudrani appeared extremely ferocious in her dark complexion.

Lord Brahma advised goddess Brahmi to do penance at Shwetgiri mountain. Similarly, Vishnupriya went to Mandarachal mountain to do her penance while Lord Shiva advised goddess Rudrani to go to Nilgiri mountain. While Vishnupriya was doing her penance at Mandarachal mountain, crores of goddesses manifested from her body prominent among whom were Vidyutprabha, Chandrakanti, Suryakanti, Gambhira, Vijaya, Jaya, Jayanti, Aparajita, etc. All these goddesses acted as the escorts of goddess Vishnupriya who is also called Vaishnavi.

One day, sage Narada visited goddess Vaishnavi and was dumbstruck by her divine beauty. He had never seen such a beautiful woman in his life. On his return journey, Narada met Mahishasur- the mighty demon, who had been blessed by Brahma. Mahishasur had conquered all the three worlds. Narada praised the glory of Mahishasur but went on to add that his majesty was incomplete untill he married Vaishnavi.

Narada said- "I have never seen such a beautiful woman in my life. She is worshipped by all the sages, gandharvas, deities as well as other celestial beings. Although you are worthy of becoming her husband yet the fact is that you can not have her as your wife untill you have conquered the deities and the Gandharvas." After sowing a seed of lust in Mahishasur's mind, Narada went away. Mahishasur vowed to marry Vaishnavi at any cost. Lord Varaha continued with the tale and said- "After Narada went away, Mahishasur summoned his ministers- Praghas, Vighas, Shanku-

kama, Vibhavasu, Vidyunmali, Sumali, Parjanya and Krura. When all the ministers arrived, he requested them to find out means so that he could marry Vaishnavi. Praghas- one of the ministers, was very intelligent. He warned Mahishasur against going ahead with his evil designs and said- This illegal abduction could become the cause for your destruction. 'Vighas corroborated the statements of Praghas. Finally everyone agreed that it would be better if Vaishnavi was persuaded to accept Mahishasur as her husband instead of forcefully abducting her.

"So all of them, finally came upon two conclusions- first was to send a messenger to persuade Vaishnavi into marrying Mahishasur and the second was to defeat the deities in a battle. A demon named Vidutprabha was sent to meet goddess Vaishnavi. Mahishasur then launched a fierce attack on the deities and defeated them. The deities were forced to flee the battlefield and seek refuge in Brahma loka."

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"Meanwhile, Vidutprabha had already reached Mandarachal mountain. Without showing any rspect to goddess Vaishnavi, he tried to impress her by narrating the amazing tale of Mahishasur's birth- 'During ancient times, there lived a sage named Suparshva. Once he was doing penance

and an ogress named Mahishmati alongwith her companions, arrived at his hermitage. Mahishmati was very much impressed by the grandeur of his hermitage and decided to occupy it. She changed her appearance and became a buffalo. She then started tormenting Suparshva, who was initially terrified but finally came to know about her real identity. Suparshva cursed her- 'You deserve to remain as a buffalo for the rest of your life.'

"Now Mahishmati became extremely terrified and begged for being pardoned. Finally, Suparshva took pity on her and said- 'You will get liberated from my curse only after you give birth to a calf.' Thus Mahishmati started wandering all over the places in the form of a buffalo. Once, while wandering, she reached the bank of river Narmada, where sage Sindhudweep was doing his penance. A significant incident had taken place just few minutes before her arrival-Sage Sindhudweep, being unable to control himself, had ejaculated sperms after infatuated by a beautiful ogress taking bath in river Narmada, which was flowing nearby. The sperms fell on a rock and was eventually washed off by the swift currents of Narmada."

"As Mahishmati was thirsty, she drank water from river Narmada. While quenching her thirst, she also consumed the sperms as the result of which she became pregnant. In course of time, she gave birth to Mahishasur, who grew up to be a mighty demon king. The same Mahishasur wants to marry you." After finishing his story, Vidutprabha waited for Vaishnavi's response.

Goddess Vaishnavi burst into a loud laughter and all the the three worlds became visible to the messenger, through her opened mouth. Vidutprabha was scarred to the hilt as he realized that the woman was extraordinary and divine.

Jaya-a dwarpalika of Vaishnavi, told him- 'Our goddess has taken a vow of celibacy, hence your master's wish will remain unfulfilled.' At last, Vidutprabha went back empty handed. In the meantime, Narada arrived there and informed goddess Vaishnavi about the deities's defeat at the hands of Mahishasur and requested her to kill the demon.

Goddess Vaishnavi ordered her escorts to get prepared for the battle. She

then proceeded with a huge army to fight against the demons. In the ensuing battle, Mahishasur's army was severely humiliated. Most of the demons were killed and the survivors fled from the battlefield. A demon named Virupaksha informed Mahishasur of the death and destruction caused by goddess Vaishnavi.Mahishasur was infuriated and came forward to fight the goddess. Goddess Vaishnavi was aware of his might, so she manifested her divine form in all her glory. Now she possessed ten arms and held lethal weapons like a sword, a bow, a shield, a mace, a trident, a chakra, etc. in each of them. She then remembered lord Shiva, who appeared within a moment. Goddess Vaishnavi requested him to be witness to the fierce battle, which was going to take place.

A fierce battle commenced, which lasted for ten thousand divine years. Mahishasur ran helter and skelter, changing his disguise frequently, in order to protect his life but goddess Vaishnavi chased him wherever he went. Ultimately she killed him at 'Shata- Sring' mountain by severing his head. All the deities heaved a sigh of relief and praised the glory of goddess Vaishnavi.

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Similarly, goddess Rudrani, who had manifested from lord Shiva and had gone to Nilgiri mountain to do her penance had killed a mighty demon named 'Ruru'. Ruru was a very powerful demon king. He ruled over Ratnapuri, which was situated in the middle of the ocean. He had become

invincible on account of a boon received from lord Brahma. After being defeated by him, all the deities went to seek the help of goddess Rudrani. Goddess Rudrani, who is also known as 'Chamunda' finally killed Ruru, the dreaded demon."

Having completed the tale, lord Varaha blessed Prithvi and went back to his abode.